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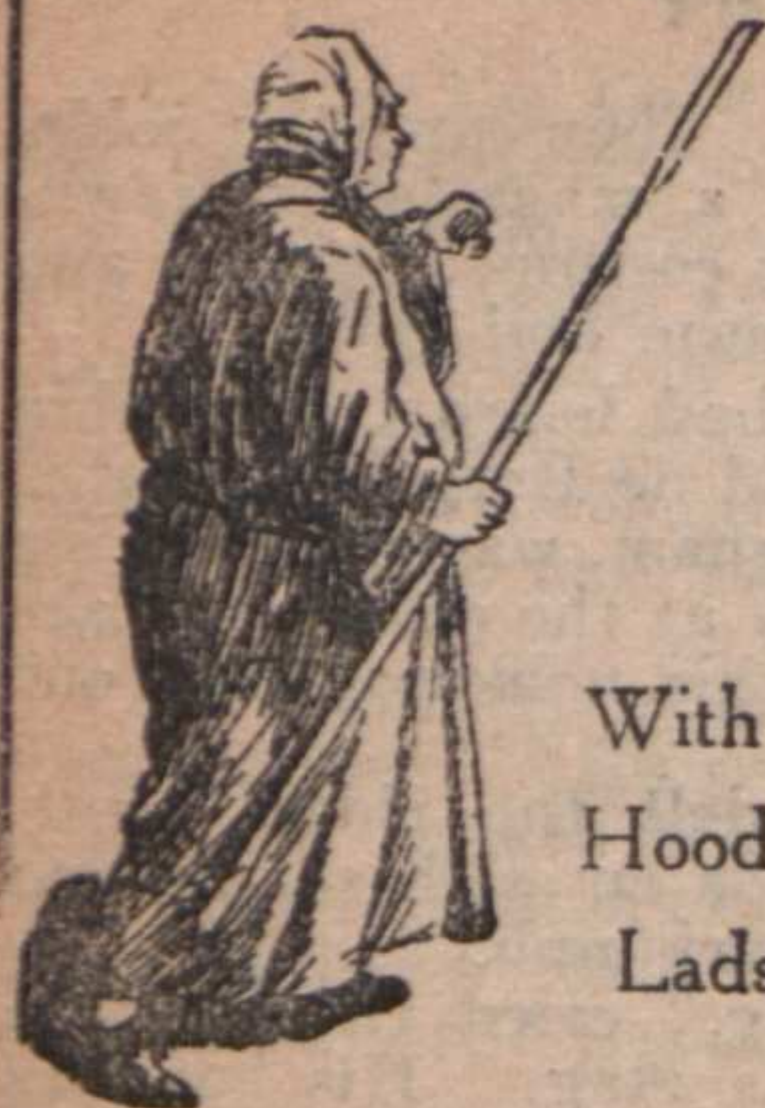
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The Fighting Friar of Sherwood

With Bold Robin
Hood and the
Lads in Green

CHAPTER 1.

Insulting Normans Kiss the Dust.

THERE had been rain and thunder overnight, but now Sherwood Forest was bathed in a glory of sunshine.

Golden light and purple shadows flickered through the green leaves, and there were life and beauty everywhere—on tree, and bush, and brake, even in the sedge-covered quagmires where the affrighted deer took refuge when Oswald de Burgh, the fierce Sheriff of Nottingham, was pursuing both beast and man.

What a life the bold followers of Robin Hood led!

They laughed danger to scorn, for the world was all their own. On their skill depended their daily food, and for enjoyment they had their shooting and wrestling matches, mock sword fights and dances, and visits to the country fairs.

Even during the rigours of winter there was a zest in the wild forest life; and we may imagine the foresters gathered round a huge fire of logs, which cost them nothing but the hewing, singing:

"Under the greenwood tree
Who loves to lie with me
And tune his merry note
Unto the sweet bird's throat,
Come hither, come hither,
come hither;
Here shall he see
No enemy
But winter and rough weather."

Robin Hood's sweetheart, Maid Marian, was walking in the forest with Martha, a maiden rescued by the outlaws from serving a villain and a murderer.

Young and pretty, the shadow of care scarcely ever fell upon the sweet faces of the two girls. Held in great respect, and honoured even by the roughest of the men, they held their places as princesses of mighty Sherwood Forest.

"It was expected that Robin would return last night," Maid Marian said; "and even now he may have reached the cave by some other way. In good sooth, there are paths that seem to be known to him alone, for oft-times he appears when he is thought to be miles away."

"Ah Marian," Martha returned, "how good and pure of soul is he—how deserving of your love! Yet strange it is that only the poor love him. If the rich only knew——"

"The rich will never understand. Poor are the friends of the poor. A rich man in these days is never contented, and is for ever accusing of ingratitude those on whose very strength he depends."

"And will it be ever thus?"

"I know not," Maid Marian replied, sighing. "That is a question which must needs be left to the future, and wiser heads than ours to answer. But come, let us turn this way, for Robin has always told me to avoid the broad tracks of the forest during his absence."

The path they took led to a dell, where grew

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bluebells and ferns in luxuriant profusion.

Each of the girls had brought cloth, spun silk, and needles with them, for the country around Sherwood was famed then for its satin and cloth of gold, just as Nottingham is famed in these days for lace.

Martha and Marian sat down beneath the emerald foliage of a sycamore, through which the breeze whispered and lingered lovingly, and soon, guided by delicate fingers, the needles flashed in and out of the shining silk.

Presently a stag appeared on the opposite side of the dell and, raising its antlered head proudly, sniffed the air. Its large, expressive eyes fell upon the maidens, but seeing in them no foe it arched its neck to crop the rich, tender grass.

Suddenly an arrow whizzed through the air. Pierced in the flank, the stag staggered, and then uttering a cry of pain and fear it turned and fled into the depths of the forest.

The arrow was short, which proved that it came from a Norman crossbow.

Maid Marian noticed this, although there was but one moment between the piercing of the stag and the animal's flight, and just as quickly she touched her companion on the arm as a sign to remain silent.

Putting down their work, the girls crouched amid the ferns in which they were already half-buried.

They were only just in time, for two savage-looking hounds came tearing through the dell with ears erect and their shaggy coats bristling with fury and excitement.

Half halting, one threw up its red jaws and lolling tongue and, giving a short yelp, as if scenting new game, went on again.

Soon the crashing of undergrowth testified that horsemen were approaching, and two men, mounted on chestnut horses with black manes and tails, came tearing along.

They were armed with crossbows, swords, and hunting-knives, and their attire left no doubt that they were in the employ of some nobleman, for on the cap and tunic of each a coat-of-arms

was embroidered. Then came the nobleman himself, in a magnificent fawn-coloured hunting costume, pointed and slashed with crimson and gold.

Maid Marian had heard from Robin Hood that Oswald de Burgh, the hated Sheriff of Nottingham, was entertaining a grand company at the castle, and she concluded that this nobleman was one of the guests.

Through the dell the riders went, urging the hounds on with shouts and exclamations of triumph.

"A king's stag," cried the Norman noble—"a king's stag. His antlers form a crown at the top. On, on! Let him not escape."

"The saints be praised that they are gone," Maid Marian breathed fervently. "But we must remain here awhile. Hark! The hounds have dragged the stag down, and the huntsmen are busy killing the poor beast."

"Can we not go?" demanded Martha. She was not as yet used to forest life, and her heart was beating violently.

"Not yet," Marian replied in a whisper. "The hounds you saw are bred from the mastiff and wolf. They are terrible creatures even to their own masters, and they can scent human beings."

Maid Marian's hope that the Normans were well away was soon dispelled. Leaving the slaughtering of the stag to his retainers, the nobleman rode straight into the dell, dismounted and tethered his horse to a tree, and flung himself down at full length within twenty paces of where the two girls lay hidden in their bower of ferns.

In a few minutes the retainers, with the hounds leashed, and bearing the antlers of the dead stag, came to their lord and master.

"We will halt here awhile," the nobleman said, "for we and our horses need rest. By Cerebus! what ails the hounds?"

"There must be folks not far away," replied one of the men, "and perchance none too honest. The forest has been scoured for Robin Hood, but in vain. It is said that he has taken himself to the Yorkshire wolds, but none know when he may return."

"Now, by the blood of the De Sayes that courses through my veins," said the noble, "I should like to meet this man and try conclusions with him. Bold he may be, and although, with a rabble of scurvy knaves at his heels, he gained entrance to Nottingham Castle, yet I do not believe half the stories told of him."

"Ask Henrick, my lord," rejoined the first retainer. "He was present at the siege, and he will tell you that Robin Hood's men fought like a trained band, and, moreover, that there were Saxon knights, ay, and Saxon soldiers, too, in his train."

"That is true, my lord," declared Henrick, doffing his cap.

"It puzzles me much," returned Lord Outram de Saye, "that this forest, vast as it is, has not been cleared long since of such vermin. Yes, by my vows of knighthood, I would like to meet this man."

Again the hounds yelped, and at a sign from his master Henrick led them forward, straining at the leash, to see if they could track the quarry which was causing them so much uneasiness.

Maid Marian knew that further concealment was useless. She rose from the ferns, and Martha followed her example.

"By the splendour of paradise, true nymphs of the wood," exclaimed Outram de Saye. "Come hither, my pretty ones. Such rosy cheeks and ruby lips as yours I never did see."

"My lord," Maid Marian said firmly, "I pray you let us depart. We are the children of humble men, and flattery falls strangely on our ears. We were affrighted at the hurry of the chase, but now——"

"By the charms of Venus, the arrow of Cupid has pierced my heart," interrupted Outram de Saye. "Of a surety you are more fit for the palace than the forest. Great Heaven!" he added to himself, "how lovely these Saxon women are!"

Paying no further heed to him, Marian and Martha turned away, but in a moment Outram de Saye was after them.

"Nay, my fair ones," he said, "not

so fast. The Saxons pay toll and tax to the Normans, yet will I let you off lightly enough, so a kiss each, and you shall go."

Marian's eye flashed as she took a step backwards and, dropping a fold of her gown secured to her girdle, revealed a jewel-hilted dagger.

"By my halidame," cried Outram de Saye, "your parents may be humble, but they have a taste for fine weapons of defence. Methinks that your sire either found or stole that dagger."

"You may account yourself of noble birth, but you have the tongue of an insolent varlet," Marian replied. "I call Heaven to witness that my sire was as honest a man as any Norman that ever breathed, ay, and more so. He did not steal land, nor took he aught but what he had lawful right to."

At the girl's words the face of Outram de Saye flushed with the deep, dark blood of his race.

"Insolent tongue," he repeated. "Beware, girl, or my henchmen shall carry you off whether you will or not. I am not afraid of the pretty toy hanging at your girdle. Come, sweet lasses, a kiss each, and I will forgive all."

"Coward!" Marian cried. "Keep your hands from me, or by the evil fate that brought you to this country I will plunge this dagger into your dastardly heart."

"Now the tigress leaves her purring and shows her claws," Outram de Saye said. "Ho, there, Henrick and Guillaume, pinion her arms."

The two retainers had been enjoying the scene immensely, and now they advanced laughing, but cautiously, for Marian's keen blade was flickering mischief in the sun.

"Pounce on her from behind, Henrick," Guillaume growled, "and I'll do the rest."

But Martha's blood was now roused. Bondship and cruelty had well-nigh broken her heart and made her as timid as a fawn; but now, throwing off all sign of fear, she rushed at Guillaume, buffeted and scratched his face, and tore his hair.

Smarting, baffled, and white with passion, Guillaume drew his long hunting-

knife; but even as it flashed in the air a voice cried:

"Hold!"

A man appeared so suddenly that he might have come from the very earth itself.

He was a monk, garbed in coarse, brown cloth, closely cowed, and leaning on a long staff. Short of stature and sturdy of build, he appeared to be quite feeble.

"Friar," said Outram de Saye, "this is no business of yours. Get you to your cell and pray that greater sins may be forgiven than a Norman noble desiring to kiss a pair of maidens."

"My son," replied the monk, keeping his head down, "lover may kiss lover without the censure of the Holy Church, for true love is lawful. But I see that the maidens are modest and resent your advances; seek not, therefore, to annoy them."

"Away! Get you from my path, doddering fool!" De Saye thundered.

The words were not well out of his mouth when the monk, clutching his staff with both hands in the middle, twirled it over his head and struck Outram de Saye to the earth in a manner that the shirt of mail under his surcoat jingled like harness.

Another twirl of the staff brought Guillaume down on his knees with a head so cracked and bruised that a month would be needed to heal it.

Henrick, wise in his generation, fled behind his horse. Pulling his hunting-horn round, he was about to sound it when the monk, throwing back his cowl, revealed the rosy-red face of Friar Tuck.

"One note, hireling," warned the friar in stern tones, "and there shall be one Norman less in the land. Yield you, all three!"

As he finished speaking he put a silver whistle to his lips and made a piping a little louder than a blackbird at mating time.

And then the forest seemed to be alive with men. Leaping over thicket and brier, darting behind trees, they poured into the dell; and the three bewildered Normans gazed at the barbed ends of a score of arrows aimed at them.

"My lads," said Friar Tuck, "this

great nobleman and his two retainers, elated at having slain a stag, have pounced on our ewe lambs. Doubtless our chief, Robin Hood, King of Sherwood Forest, would be pleased to hear what they mean by it."

Outram de Saye trembled inwardly, but maintained a bold face.

"I meant no harm," he declared. "I asked for a kiss in sport, and——"

"Forsooth," Friar Tuck interrupted; "if you talk for a month you will not mend matters. Robin Hood has but just returned, and sent me in search of his sweetheart, Marian, and the other maiden, so you will do well to come with a good will, or, by the rod of Moses, I'll have you all three tied in bundle and dragged by the heels!"

Then up strode Little John, the bearded giant.

"By the greenwood tree we love so well," he cried, in a jovial voice, "Heaven has made amends by sending us three good horses as well as three cowards. A rope here; I'll bind them and promise to bring them along. And since they are so fond of kisses they shall salute many a briar on the way."

"Hold!" exclaimed Outram de Saye. "No violence. We will go wherever you are inclined to take us."

"When needs must—by your leave, friar—the devil drives," quoth Little John.

Crestfallen, and eating their hearts out with impotent rage, the three Normans were blindfolded and marched along through many intricate ways.

In their bewilderment they believed they were describing a series of circles, over the same stones and through the same thickets. But at length the wrappers were torn from their eyes and they found themselves at the deep yawning mouth of a cave, near which Robin Hood, splendidly dressed, with glittering jewels on his buckles and one on his breast, reclined.

"Welcome, my merry men," he greeted, paying no heed whatever to the prisoners, "and to you, too, holy father. How has the world wagged since my absence?"

"Not so well as if you had been with us," Little John replied. "We have

kept the rats away. My faith! they seem to hear us breathe, and scamper off without daring even to squeak."

Robin Hood nodded approval, and then his splendid eyes flashed upon Outram de Saye and his men.

"Perchance," he said, "these good gentlemen have lost their way and, with your usual forethought, you have brought them here to be my guests."

Friar Tuck took Marian and Martha by their hands, and leading them forward said:

"Maids of the forest, tell your own stories."

Maid Marian spoke up, modestly but firmly.

"There is yet time," she added in conclusion, pointing to Outram de Saye, "for this man to express his sorrow. Methought at first that he had emptied his wine-horn too often; but he had time to reflect, and behaved worse than the lowliest hedger, urging his men on to seize us."

"Down on your craven knees," Robin Hood thundered, starting to his feet, "and kiss the very dust at these ladies' feet."

The two henchmen obeyed immediately, but Outram de Saye, pale to the lips, folded his arms and stood frowning.

"Robin Hood," he said, gnawing at his towny moustache, "I am of noble birth, and will answer to none but my peers. If I have done wrong I crave the maidens' pardon, but I will not kneel."

"Does this come of your boasted chivalry borrowed from the dancing Frenchmen?" Robin Hood demanded, sneering. "Is this the way you champion ladies and fulfil your vows to protect them from insult and danger? Dog of a Norman, you shall kneel even if your legs break in the doing. Ho! there, Little John. Down with him, and press his lips to the earth."

It was done in a moment. The giant simply took Outram de Saye by the neck with one hand, and bent him like a reed.

"Robber and villain!" De Saye hissed as he scrambled to his feet, "if you had a thousands lives I would have them for

this outrage. Accursed Saxon! But what is that? Ha! the sheriff's retinue ride through the forest. He who laughs last laughs best. Now we shall see."

"Into the cave with them," cried Robin Hood. "Up, archers! Bow, string, and arrow! Ho, ho! There is to be merry sport. Sound the alarm and we'll have a nest of hornets buzzing about the ears of these Normans."

CHAPTER 2.

The Skirmish in the Forest.

"If," said Friar Tuck, kilting up his cassock and securing it with the knotted rope round his portly waist—"if I were not a man of peace, fain would I join in this, for there promises to be a fight such as warriors delight in."

"You shall have your share of fighting, good friar," Robin Hood replied, laughing, "and I doubt not but that you will acquit yourself nobly."

Meanwhile, horns were sounding and Robin Hood's scouts were rushing in with the news that Oswald de Burgh, the Sheriff of Nottingham, was approaching with a grand company of hunters, all well armed and escorted by armed men.

"And doubtless they seek the noble Outram de Saye," Robin Hood said. "But before I give him up the grass shall turn red with my last drop of blood. Look to your bows, men. A word, Ned Carter! Be there ladies among Oswald de Burgh's company?"

"I saw none."

"That is well," Robin Hood rejoined. "It shall never be said of us that a woman, be she Saxon or Norman, shall run the risk of danger without fair warning."

There were about thirty foresters present by this time, but more hastened up at another blast from Will Scarlet's horn. The Normans heard the call too, but believing that it came from Outram de Saye's henchman they answered it and followed the sound.

But presently Oswald de Burgh saw what a mistake had been made.

He had risen in the stirrups to peer about him when an arrow went whizzing through his hunting cap of velvet

and gold, and clipped off a piece of his left ear.

With a mighty shout the detested tyrant wheeled his horse round so sharply that it dropped upon its knees and nearly flung its master out of the saddle.

The arrow had come from Little John's bow, which no other man in all the forest of Sherwood could bend.

"The Evil One takes care of his own, is a true saying," the giant growled through his beard. "So! the varlet seeks refuge behind his gay company who look as scared as rabbits."

"My friend," said Friar Tuck, who was crawling on his hands and knees, dragging his quarter-staff behind him, "I pray you not leave a man of peace in the lurch. Yonder Normans like not the colour of my cloth and will show it but little respect."

Robin Hood now called sternly for silence, and forming his men into skirmishing order he put himself at their head.

The Normans, some fifty strong, had halted, and were getting ready their cumbersome crossbows and looking askance at Oswald de Burgh, who but for very shame would have bolted back to his castle and left his friends and servants to shift for themselves.

He had not forgotten how Robin Hood had tricked and beaten him before, and his hatred of the outlaw raged like a furnace in his breast.

"Bring me the head of that traitor," he cried, "and I will fill a cap with gold for the man who relieves England of such a pest."

The foresters were now advancing steadily, observing their tactics of making use of all available cover until rushing into open battle; and Friar Tuck had quite forgotten that he was a trembling man of peace, and was in front of them all.

Nor did Robin Hood send to call him back, for the wily friar had ways entirely of his own and brooked no interference.

No brier seemed to scratch him, and there was no thicket so dense but that he wriggled through easily. In a fight the friar relied mainly on his stout

quarter-staff, but he wore a sword, and when driven into a corner he could use it as deftly as a trained soldier.

In any other circumstance Robin Hood would have laughed aloud to see the jolly monk making his way towards the Normans as unconcerned as though he were playing a game of bo-peep with them.

The reward offered by Oswald de Burgh stirred his men to action; and indeed there were some of his guests whose mouths watered at the thought of a cap full of golden nobles, especially at a time when the weight of their purses had been considerably lessened to find money for the Crusade. For Richard the Lion-Hearted had not minced matters. He had given with a lavish hand, and now he was taking back with a hand just as lavish to support him in the cause he loved.

This would have been fair enough, but no sooner did the shoddy aristocracy, owing its origin to the rag-tag and bob-tail of Europe who had come over with William the Norman, find themselves heavily taxed than they set about bleeding and squeezing the poor. When money was not to be had they took goods.

But to our story. The Normans set up a shout and sent a volley of bolts from their crossbows.

Robin Hood, however, was in no hurry. If he could only get the Normans to stand he would teach them a lesson to avoid that part of Sherwood Forest. He passed the word for no man to loose an arrow until he (Robin) sounded a silver whistle which hung from a button of his tunic.

On and on went Friar Tuck, so skilfully that to those who could see him he looked like a patch of brown shadow. Suddenly he stopped at the base of a tree and vanished like a Will-o'-the-Wisp.

Almost at the same moment Robin Hood blew his whistle, and his archers, rushing out, sent a flight of arrows so well aimed that four of the Normans rolled headlong out of the saddle.

The affrighted horses dashed in the direction of the cave and were promptly captured by a few reserve men whom

Robin Hood always wisely left in the rear.

"By the darkness of Pluto's realm, are these men the despised foresters?" one of the knights cried. "My faith! Richard has lost much by not taking them with him to the Holy Land."

"Peace, Sir Walter Chandselle," Oswald de Burgh replied. "Look to yourself! To cover, all, or there will be no man left to tell the tale."

"Nearer, a little nearer, my merry men," Robin Hood said. "Work round them, sons of the free. There is a fine haul in store for us. Capture the knights, and since Oswald de Burgh is so anxious for my head, bring me his own if you can."

Another volley of arrows sped on their way, but the Normans were now hiding behind the trees and little damage was done.

"This is not sport enough for me," Robin Hood said as Little John came to his side. "We must sling our bows and fall hand to hand upon them."

It seemed that Oswald de Burgh heard these words, for, pretending that his horse was restive, he set spurs and dashed away at a mad gallop.

"Son of a coward!" Robin Hood shouted with a merry laugh, "get you to your thick walls, which I have seen the other side of. Ho, there, knights and retainers, surrender to the King of Sherwood Forest, or eat of his feast of barbed steel."

"Never!" exclaimed Sir Walter Chandselle. "I am a true-born knight, and will not yield while my heart beats. Ah! the varlets have left me."

True it was, for the other Normans, both the mounted and afoot, began to beat a retreat.

They had not taken many paces, however, when there was a tremendous commotion among them. Friar Tuck, crawling from tree base to tree base, had climbed into one, and now, to the terror of the Normans, he fell into their midst as from the very clouds.

Whack! crack! whack! went the jolly monk's quarter-staff, and up went the Normans' arms to shield their heads from the rain of blows.

"Death and confusion!" roared one

burly knight as he rolled on the ground. "If it was for this that I became Oswald de Burgh's guest, he may keep his hospitality for such as can enjoy it."

The fallen knight, once off his horse, was much too unwieldy in his armour to get up again without assistance, which was soon accorded by Robin Hood's men, who rushed to the aid of Friar Tuck.

Not that the jolly monk needed it. He was quite in the element he enjoyed most, and shouting and singing he laid about him with such hearty good will that he was soon standing alone, a dozen Normans with cracked heads lying round him.

Sir Walter Chandselle remained firm upon his horse, and Robin Hood, stepping into the open, said:

"Sir, you are a brave man, and I would that you were of Saxon birth. Not a groat of yours shall be touched, nor a hair of your head harmed. Come, gallant knight, be my guest for a while, and then some of my men shall see you in safety to the border of the forest."

"Outlaw you may be," Sir Walter responded, "but you are worthy of my steel. I'll drink with you and eat with you after I have fought with you, but, 'fore Heaven, not before."

So saying Sir Walter Chandselle leaped, sword in hand, from his horse, shouting his battle-cry, "A Chandselle! A Chandselle! Defeat, if must be, but not with dishonour!"

Robin Hood engaged with him instantly, and by running his blade down to the hilt of Sir Walter's sword gave his wrist a smart twist, and the weapon went spinning into the branches of a tree.

Sir Walter was astounded, and it was some moments before he managed to say:

"You are indeed King of Sherwood Forest by deeds of arms, if not by right. I have never met your like before. And now here I am in your power. Do as you will."

"Take back your sword," Robin Hood replied, "and with it my hand. Fear not; my blood is as noble as your own. My father was Earl of Huntingdon."

"Not Robin Fitzooth?"

"The same, as the blue sky of heaven is above us. I am Robin Fitzooth and Earl of Huntingdon too, but I prefer to call myself Robin Hood."

"Your father was a courtly man, and you bear his name bravely," Sir Walter Chandselle rejoined. "But what manner of person is this?" pointing to Friar Tuck.

"I am a man of peace," the monk humbly said as he came forward. "I am priest to these good people of the forest; but I fear me much that I have hurt some poor men to-day."

"By the holy relics they will hold you in their memory," Sir Walter replied, bursting out laughing. "And now, Robin Hood, guide me where you will. I will taste your fare even though it be poorer than a hogward's."

Little John let out a roar.

"Methinks, Sir Knight," said he, stepping forward, "that when you enter yon cave your eyes will be greeted with a surprise."

Robin Hood led the way, and calling Maid Marian and Martha from the cavern he said:

"Here is so true a knight that 'tis pity he ever clasped the hand of so great a villain as Oswald de Burgh. He shall hear all anon and judge between ourselves and him. But bustle—bustle. Bring forth the best, for we have a right noble guest to-day."

On entering the cave Sir Walter Chandselle started back.

"What, you here too, Sir Outram de Saye?" he cried. "I did not think you——"

"Blame the hour that ever brought me to Sherwood Forest!" De Saye interrupted. "Can you not see that my hands are bound? I am a prisoner."

Sir Walter Chandselle turned to Robin Hood for an explanation, but the latter merely went on giving instructions for the feast.

But later, as they ate and drank, the outlaw told his guest all, and Sir Walter's face grew sad and angry by turns.

"Shame upon you, Outram de Saye!" he cried at last. "I have done with you for ever."

"And shame upon you to side with

freebooters and varlets!" Outram de Saye retorted. "But we shall meet again, and I'll hold you to account."

"When you will."

"Varlets, forsooth!" put in Robin Hood, laughing as he pointed to two of his men attired in a style superior to the rest. "There sit two good knights—Sir Eustace Alleyne and Sir Edward Thorgood—who have enlisted in my service. They prefer my laws and a life of freedom to the rule of such tyrants as Prince John and the jackanapes who fawn for favours at his feet."

Just then some of the outlaw's men came in with the spoil taken from the Normans, consisting of money, gold chains, and many other things.

"Toss them into our poor-box," directed Robin Hood, pointing to an iron-bound chest. "Sit you down, rest, and be merry. We'll talk to Outram de Saye anon, but 'fore Heaven he shall not go hungry or thirsty. Ho, there, Will Scarlet! see to his wants, and forget not his henchmen. Now, Marian, sing to us."

Taking a lute into her hand, Maid Marian sang in a sweet, enchanting voice:

"There came a minstrel bright and free,
Blue were his eyes as the heavens be,
And noble of mien and face was he;
Sang he of war and ladies' e'e,
Soft love, and of the glorious chivalry,
Then cried, 'Love, will you go with me?'
Love wept and smiled and shook his head,
And along went the minstrel ill-beset.
Love is not won by minstrelsy.

"O then to young Love beneath the tree
Came one as young and fair as he,
And as like to him as like can be,
And clapping his little wings for glee,
With nods and smiles and kisses free,
He whispered, 'Come, O come with me.'
Love pouted, and flouted, and shook his head,
But along with that winsome youth he sped,
'And love wins love,' loud chanted he."

"Amen!" said Friar Tuck, waking up suddenly.

"Hear now this snoring monk," cried Little John. "Gramercy! He was asleep and dreaming of angels."

Marian put down the lute and joined in the laughter with the rest.

"Methought vespers had just ended," Friar Tuck explained, staring sleepily about him.

Maid Marian and Martha now withdrew to a bower not far from the cave, and Robin Hood, drawing Sir Walter Chandsele aside, talked earnestly to him.

"Your hand again," the outlaw said, at length. "For your sake he shall be forgiven; and perchance when he speaks of Robin Hood he will say that, freebooter though he be, he knows how to forget and forgive."

Will Scarlet was then ordered to remove the bonds from Outram de Saye and his henchmen. Their horses were returned to them, and they were sent on their journey; but Sir Walter Chandsele stayed on and slept that night in the outlaw's cave.

Early in the morning he departed, Robin Hood sending with him an escort which a prince might have been proud of; and the knight, riding straight to Nottingham Castle, demanded admittance.

The reception accorded him was none of the warmest. Oswald de Burgh frowned upon him, and the sullen De Saye held aloof, muttering anathemas against traitors and lovers of robbers.

"Say you so?" Sir Walter cried, flinging down his gauntlet. "Then let me tell you that if you were half as honest and true as Robin Hood you would be a better man."

"Now, by the rood, that smells of treason!" Oswald de Burgh cried. "Sir Walter, you had done well to weigh such words before you uttered them in my presence."

"When you are master of my thoughts, heart, and tongue," Sir Walter retorted hotly, "I will be answerable to you. No longer will I be your guest, but return to London with all despatch. As for you, Outram de Saye, when I am beyond the castle walls you will find me at your service."

Outram de Saye made no attempt to pick up the gauntlet which Chandsele had thrown down as a challenge, and Sir Walter, stooping, recovered it with a sneering laugh.

"Brag and bluster," he said, "never

made a wound yet. Adieu! I go, and soon to the Holy Land. And when I meet the Lion-Hearted King I will bid him ride to Sherwood Forest when he returns and hear Robin Hood's story from his own lips."

"Not so fast, Sir Walter Chandsele," said Oswald de Burgh; "remember you are not beyond the walls of the castle."

"What! would you dare detain me?"

"I dare detain any man that I suspect of treason," the Sheriff of Nottingham replied.

"Treason waits on treason when a man eggs on a prince against the King, his brother," Sir Walter cried, his eyes flashing.

"And you accuse me of that! By the bones of the martyrs! I have good right to have you apprehended and lodged in a dungeon."

"That for my answer to your threats," Sir Walter responded, striking Oswald de Burgh on the mouth with his gauntlet. "Now call your guards; but let me tell you that if I am not in London Town three days from hence, twice five hundred swords and lances will be on the road to Nottingham."

"Now, by the thunder of Jove, am I bearded under my own roof!" Oswald de Burgh exclaimed. "Get you gone, Sir Walter, and rest assured that you shall hear more of this. 'Tis not every knight dreaming of the Holy Land who reaches there. Away, lest I be tempted to thrust this dagger into your heart!"

"The time will come when you will wish that you had turned the point on your own body," Sir Walter replied haughtily as he moved away.

He was under the arched doorway, calling to his esquire to make his horse ready, when two men, bearing between them a heavy basket, came staggering along.

"How now, knaves! what have you there?" Oswald de Burgh demanded.

"This basket was to be brought straightway to your grace, so the messenger said," was the reply.

"Open it, then, quickly."

The lid was thrown back, and presently the men dragged out a fine haunch of venison, bearing a placard

on which was written, in great, round clerical characters:

"A HAUNCH OF VENISON FROM THE FIGHTING FRIAR OF SHERWOOD FOREST."

Sir Walter Chandselle laughed outright, and the men who brought the present groaned and snorted under the agony of suppressed laughter.

"Throw that carrion to the pigs!" Oswald de Burgh ordered, white to the lips with fury. "Begone, varlets! Out of my sight! There is a conspiracy among you, one and all, against me."

As Sir Walter Chandselle, attended by his esquire and retainers, rode across the drawbridge, he turned and looked at the frowning towers of Nottingham Castle.

"Of a truth," he murmured, "I would rather be a hog-ward and share my meals with swine than be that man. But I must look to myself. There is mischief afloat."

CHAPTER 3.

Another Blow in Freedom's Cause.

Not far from Nottingham, just on the borders of the forest, there dwelt Edwin Thordon and his wife. They had one child, Gunhilda by name. She was a fair-haired, sweet-dispositioned lass, who led the cows to the pasture and called them home when the sun went down. For years these people had lived there, holding aloof from the struggles between Saxon and Norman, and although heavily burdened, uttering but few complaints of or to their ruthless tax-masters.

There was reason for this. The old folks, like their neighbours, groaned in spirit at the injustice dealt out to them by greedy, savage hands; but there were rumours about that certain of the foresters' daughters had mysteriously disappeared, or, in other words, had been abducted by the Norman oppressors and forced to become slaves in their households; and the thought of losing Gunhilda was worse than death to Thordon and his wife.

So they pretended to hold in with the Normans. But there came a time when

trouble sat heavily on the roof of Thordon's humble cottage, and its dark shadow dogged the hard-working man's footsteps.

Disaster followed disaster. Some valuable cows died—poisoned, so some said, by branches of yew being strewn about the pastures; then came debts that were never paid; a blight fell upon the fruit, and Thordon was at his wits' end to know how to meet the demands which would soon be levied on him by the sheriff.

One morning he stood at his cottage door, grave and silent. All nature was glad, but he was sad, for in a few days the sheriff's agents would be round, and Thordon knew by experience that it would be idle to offer any excuse, or ask for extension of time.

On the uplands which he rented the remainder of his stock was grazing peacefully, little knowing what was rankling at their master's heart.

His wife was in the dairy, preparing and sampling the cheese and butter, destined to reach the market on the following morning, and Gunhilda sang as she drew water from the deep well in the garden.

Her song was of war and tears, such as the Saxon maidens sang after the Conquest as they sat spinning and weaving with aching fingers, but still more aching hearts.

"The worst has come," Thordon muttered. "I have done everything, tried everything, but all to no purpose. Has God deserted us?"

He put the thought from him, for Thordon was a good, trustful, hoping man. But now hope there seemed to be none.

Presently he heard the sound of horses and the voices of men coming his way.

"Oswald de Burgh is in a greater hurry than usual," he said. "But what does a day or two matter? I can give the steward only one answer. Heaven aid a ruined man!"

Then, turning to Gunhilda, he said:

"Go to your mother and keep out of sight until I bid you come to me."

Gunhilda obeyed at once. She guessed there was danger, and dropping the

brimming buckets with a clatter she ran indoors.

For these Normans were as coarse of jest as they were cruel of heart. They thought nothing of stroking a maiden's face, or chucking her under the chin, and did she resent the insult they only roared with laughter.

Edwin Thordon's heart was heavy enough, but it sank lower when he saw Oswald de Burgh riding side by side with his steward, a man specially selected for his lack of human kindness.

Following them in close order came a company of armed men, as stiff as statues and silent as mutes.

"Greetings, friend Thordon," Oswald de Burgh said. "It always does my heart good to see you, for, in truth, you are one of the few Saxons who do not skulk away at my approach. But where is your smile to-day?"

"I left it with the good fortune that fled from me," Thordon replied.

"Ah, well," rejoined the sheriff, twirling his moustache, "it was not intended that we should find gold under every pebble. Here is the account of what is due to me, and—ha, ha!—short settlements make long friends."

"I crave your leniency," Thordon said. "In a month's time I will come to the castle with the money, or I give you leave to take possession of my land and stock."

"Leave! Leave! Give me leave to take what is already my own," quoth Oswald de Burgh. "You have a merry way of jesting which I did not give you credit for."

"I have no cause for jesting," Thordon said. "My best milch cows died, and a blight has fallen on my crops. Sheriff of Nottingham, I cannot pay you now. Give me—"

"I'll give you no longer than to-morrow evening," Oswald de Burgh interrupted sharply. "I have no wish to be harsh with you—but stay! Where is your pretty daughter, and what means this hush in your house which is usually so full of blithe sounds?"

"When the heart is sad it has no song," Thordon responded. "My daughter is well in health, sheriff."

"I would see her."

"That you cannot do," said Thordon, smoothing away the angry frown that was gathering on his face.

"There is more than a spice of defiance in your words," Oswald de Burgh returned, "and I like it not. I cannot stay now, having other business in hand. You can write?"

"Yes; the good friars taught me when I was a boy."

"Then write me a report of your troubles, and send your daughter up to the castle with it."

"My daughter will not go to the castle," said Thordon stoutly. "And what will avail a report of my sorrows? Will it bring me gold, or send me a plentiful harvest? No. I have told you the truth, and ask you to be content with it."

"Then I have no more to say," Oswald de Burgh snarled. "Be ready with the gold due to me at vesper time, or—"

"Or what?" demanded Thordon.

"We shall see," replied Oswald de Burgh, with a laugh that sounded like a file grating on rusty steel. Then, shouting an order to his retainers, he rode away.

Thordon watched the Sheriff of Nottingham and his men until they were out of sight; then he lowered his head, and great tears, born of misery, rolled down his furrowed cheeks.

While he stood thus a figure stole upon him as silently as a spectre,

"My son, what ails you?"

Thordon started at the sound of the voice, and was astonished at seeing a monk of portly dimensions standing a few paces away.

"All that's ill ails me," the Saxon made reply when he had recovered from his astonishment.

"Tell me the story of your woes. May I come within?"

"No door should be closed against a holy man," Thordon said. "Such as my humble abode can afford is at your service."

"I need nothing, my son," declared the monk, entering the cottage and seating himself on a stool. "Now pour your sorrows into my ear. A little help is worth a deal of pity, so 'tis said, and

truly. But at all times a man is the better for unburdening his heart, even though it be of the direst sin, and"—catching at his breast—"I fear me we are all sinners."

Thordon's story did not take long to tell; and while he was speaking the monk, cowed and motionless, uttered never a word, but seemed to be lost in thought.

"Twenty golden nobles is a great sum," said the holy man at length. "Have you no friend?"

"Ay, I have many friends, but they are all as poor as myself."

The monk drummed his fingers on his knees.

"'Tis a poor consolation to tell a man that the world is cold and hard," he said. "You have a true spirit, and you did well to tell the Norman that your daughter should not go to his castle. Where is your daughter?"

Thordon called her, and she came at once. The monk looked at her keenly without raising his cowl.

"Go back to your mother, little one," he said, after a pause. "And now, my son," turning to Thordon, "walk with me a short way. Your story has interested me keenly, and perchance I may hit upon a plan to help you. Nay; be not too confident—I only said perchance, and that implies a doubt. But come with me, and lend me your arm. This staff is my chief support now; but I call to mind the time when I ran and jumped with the best. Ah, me! that was many years ago."

Thordon was not absent from his home very long, but when he returned his eyes were brighter and he spoke more cheerily. Still, that night the doors of his homestead were made doubly fast, and all through the next day until towards evening, when, strange to say, the front door was flung wide open and Gunhilda sat beneath the porch, busy with her spinning-wheel.

The stars—the sentinels of the night—twinkled down upon her, and the trees seemed to be watching, watching, watching.

Night flung her mantle on the earth, making all dark and shadowy, leaving nothing but the lingering scent of

flowers and a calm and holy silence. But still there were mysterious shadows that came drifting from the boles of the trees, vanishing ere one could say what they were or what shape they took.

Suddenly a light flashed up, and Thordon, bearing a lamp, came out to the porch.

"Come within, child," he said. "Oswald de Burgh may have repented of his threat, or——"

"Hark, father!" the girl interrupted, drawing closer to his side. "The sheriff and his train are coming. Listen, listen! Do you not hear?"

"'Tis well!" Thordon replied. "I am ready to meet them. Stay you here, child, and do not tremble. No harm shall come to you. Have I not told you so?"

"Yes, yes, I have tried to be brave; but now my heart misgives me. I fear these dreadful men."

Thordon took a double-edged sword, and buckling it to his belt went to the door to meet the Normans. The procession was exactly the same as that of the previous day. Oswald de Burgh and his steward rode first, the retainers following, silent, but on the alert.

"Sheriff," said Thordon, thrusting his hand into his wallet, "there is no need for you to dismount; but let your steward do so and write me out a receipt. Here is your money, and it makes me free of you for another year."

But Oswald de Burgh was already out of the saddle, and despite that Thordon tried to bar the way he went striding into the house.

"There are miracles in these days, it seems," he said, flashing his eyes on Gunhilda, who had retreated at his approach. "Yesterday you were poor, pleading for time, and now your hands are full of gold."

"That does not concern you," Thordon replied. "Here is the amount of your claim; be satisfied, and go."

Oswald de Burgh had come for more than his money. All day long his evil mind had been at work to find a way of carrying off Gunhilda that she might slave in his household, and again his roving eyes settled on her.

"You forget," he said, "that it is my duty to see the law well observed. I accuse no man unjustly, yet I call you to account for this sudden accumulation of wealth. There are all sorts of reports afloat concerning gentles being waylaid in the forest, even in the open day."

The Norman's object now was to anger Thordon, so as to give an excuse for carrying the Saxon off as a prisoner. Gunhilda would follow as a matter of course.

But Edwin Thordon saw with his inner eyes, and adopting a more conciliatory tone said:

"If you hear aught against my honesty, I will appear before any baron you may choose to name."

"Baron!" roared Oswald de Burgh, "am I not sheriff of the county, lord of the manor of Sherwood, and assessor? Arrest him, steward!"

The steward advanced, keeping his eye upon Thordon's sword; but the Saxon made no attempt to draw it. Gunhilda sat perfectly still, her eyes fixed on the door that led to the inner room.

It flew open at the very moment that the burly steward clapped his hand on Thordon's shoulder. An arrow came from the darkness of the inner room, and the steward, yelling "Oh, I am slain!" fell at Oswald de Burgh's feet.

One mighty shout of amazement did the Sheriff of Nottingham give; then, rushing headlong from the house, he dragged his shaking limbs into the saddle and took refuge behind his mounted retainers.

"Down with them!" he cried. "Burn the hovel over their heads!"

His savage words were answered by ringing shouts, but not from Norman throats.

"This way, my merry men! Ho, for the lads in Lincoln green! Sweet liberty or death!"

"Robin Hood, by all that is evil!" Oswald de Burgh exclaimed. "Away, before they get their accursed bows to work!"

A peal of mocking laughter fell upon his ears as he dashed off at full speed.

In the darkness it was useless to at-

tempt to shoot with any sort of accuracy, but several of the foresters followed in pursuit on foot.

The Normans rode hard but cautiously, for the lower branches of the trees were like so many traps to send them flying into the very arms of the foresters.

Friar Tuck—and he it was who had called previously on Thordon—joined in the chase, flourishing his much-dreaded quarter-staff. He was just aiming a blow at one of the hindmost Normans when his foot slipped and down he went.

By this time a few notes from Robin Hood's horn had called back his men, and the jolly old monk was left alone and in a very awkward predicament.

Seeing that the foresters had fallen back, the Normans made sure of Friar Tuck. Several fell upon him at the same time; and Oswald de Burgh came riding back, and rubbing his hands with glee said:

"Two of you remain and bring him along. Put a rope about his heels and bump him over the ground, for it matters not to me how he reaches the castle."

"But he will be dead long ere he reaches there," said one of the men. "How shall we dispose of his body?"

"Oh, fling it into the moat for our great pike to feed upon," Oswald de Burgh replied brutally. "Ha, ha! How they would snap their jaws if they knew of the feast in store for them!"

Friar Tuck heard all this, though the words came to him as in a dream, for he was half stunned.

"Here's a fix for a man of peace to be in," thought he. "It would be madness to try to run away, and if I shout for help they will murder me before the words are out of my mouth. And here, too, is my quarter-staff lying at my side as useless as I am."

But, as we know, the friar was a man of resource, and it was not long before he made up his mind what to do. As soon as De Burgh had ridden on, leaving him alone with the two retainers, he indulged in a long-drawn groan, sighed deeply, and stiffened himself out.

"He is dead already," said one of the men.

"Make sure of him, Robaix," the other replied. "Draw your sword across his throat."

"Not I, Jacques le Loup," Robaix rejoined, shuddering. "I would not scruple to serve an ordinary man thus, but he is a father of the Church and I fear its curse."

"A good man, this," thought Friar Tuck, who would have given all he possessed to chuckle just then. "How I love him!"

"Pshaw! I am not made of such soft stuff," said Jacques le Loup. "Friar or no friar, he was a curse to us and I doubt if he has gone straight to heaven."

"I am done for," Friar Tuck thought as he heard the fellow scrambling off his horse.

But Le Loup hesitated, too. Leaning on his bare sword he gazed pensively at the friar's bulky form. The terrors of excommunication seized him, and presently sheathing his sword he said:

"Hand me down the rope we brought to bind the Saxon with. We may drag the friar over the ground, but we must not shed his blood with our hands."

"That would hold good in both Church and State Laws," Robaix agreed, much relieved. "A murrain seize the rope; it has got knotted and twisted at my saddle-bow."

At this juncture a dreadful thing happened to Friar Tuck. A blade of grass tickled his nose, and he wanted to sneeze. He held his breath and grew black in the face, but he felt that he must sneeze or burst.

And all the time Le Loup was bending over him, waiting for the rope which his companion was wrestling with.

Lower and lower Le Loup bent his head, and all the while the sneeze was coming.

Forth it burst at last, accompanied with a prodigious snort like an elephant at bay, and at the same moment Friar Tuck shot up his feet.

Kicked under the chin, Le Loup gave

a blood-curdling scream and ran towards his horse.

"Away! Away!" he howled. "A demon has taken possession of the friar's body. The dead has come to life again."

Superstitious to the last degree, the two Normans rode off full pelt, and Friar Tuck sat up.

"I did not think that Providence would desert a man of peace," he said. "Faith! what a narrow escape, and what a state I am in! I have lost pounds of flesh."

Rising, he grasped his quarter-staff and started for Thordon's house, arriving there just as Robin Hood was organising a band of men for his rescue.

"What right had a man of your weight to go floundering about in the dark?" the outlaw demanded angrily.

"Son," Friar Tuck replied naively, "chide not your father. Even I, a man of peace, could not help giving chase to the rascally crew. Withhold your judgment, for out of this I see great things. A word in your ear, good Robin."

Whatever it was that the jovial friar whispered in Robin's ear, it set him laughing so boisterously that he was fain to throw himself down and put his hands to his sides.

"You have hit the right nail on the head," he said. "Friar, you are a treasure. But now to more serious business. Thordon and his wife and daughter cannot remain here. They must come with us. At early dawn their cattle shall be driven in."

"Oh dear me," groaned Friar Tuck, rolling up his eyes, "Oswald de Burgh will not get his rent after all."

"Thordon offered to return me the money I lent him," Robin Hood rejoined, "but I would have none of it, since it came from the purse of our generous friend, Outram de Saye. Now to work; time wanes and there is much to do."

When the sun sent up golden shafts, heralding its approach, a cloud of black smoke hovered over the cottage. Thordon sighed as he took a last look at his burning homestead.

"Farewell roof that has sheltered me so long," he said. "But better burn than ring with the vile jests of Norman churls. Farewell."

"Yes," said Robin Hood, placing his hand on the other's shoulder, "farewell to a life of doubt and hardship, for one of freedom in the forest. Better the fierce lightning, the crash of thunder, and the blighting winds and snow of winter, than serfdom. On, on! Ho, for the greenwood tree!"

CHAPTER 4.

What Happened at Nottingham Fair.

ALTHOUGH a coward at heart, Oswald de Burgh had but one aim in life now—the destruction of Robin Hood. If he was killed in action, well and good; but the sheriff vowed that if the young Saxon fell into his hands alive he should die by slow torture.

When the two retainers returned to Nottingham Castle without Friar Tuck, the Sheriff of Nottingham ordered them to be hanged.

Oswald de Burgh then called for volunteers to go where Friar Tuck had been left, but no man stirred until the sheriff, beside himself with rage, called them cowards and base-born hirelings.

Then one man, bolder than the rest, stepped forward.

"Sir," he said, "I fought under the banner of the King's dead father and acquitted myself as a soldier should. Therefore, I am neither coward nor baseborn. Here I am, ready to follow you back to the forest, if you dare lead the way."

Oswald de Burgh stared at the man and looked ready to spring upon him; but suddenly he snapped his fingers and strode away.

Early next day news was brought him that Thordon's cottage was burnt to the ground, the cattle driven away and the standing crops destroyed, so that they should not yield him a penny profit.

The sheriff made no comment. He must nurse his vengeance, keep calm, or go mad, for he was a full-blooded man, and his leech—doctor, as we

should call him now—had warned him that a burst of anger might bring on a fit and kill him. He sent a report to Prince John imploring assistance, declaring that no man's life or property was safe while Robin Hood lived.

"Low ruffians, murderers, and thieves," he wrote, "are flocking to him. Vagabonds become rich men, and scarcely a day passes but that some hapless band of travellers complain to me of being robbed and maltreated by these wretches, who say that they are answerable to Robin Hood for their actions. Therefore, I beg of your royal highness to send strangers disguised as yeomen to Sherwood Forest, but so armed as to combat successfully with these pests."

The prince was holding Court in London when he received the sheriff's letter, and he vowed by the crown of England, "which," said he, "in the order of nature should encircle my brow," that he would take such steps as would clear the forest, even if he left it as bare as the floor beneath his feet.

The time for the holding of Nottingham Fair was coming along. It was the great festival of the year. Farmers brought sheep, horses, and cattle from great distances, and growers of everything horticultural and agricultural came with heavily-laden wagons. There were shows galore, and a mart, besides, at which wearing apparel, and indeed everything necessary for household purposes, was on sale.

Christians and Jews, as well as men of foreign bearing, came to Nottingham Fair, which lasted a week, and was from beginning to end a scene of revelry.

All the great people of the shire were expected to be there, not excepting Oswald de Burgh, whose heralds declared the fair open and declared it closed with a fanfare of trumpets.

In contradiction of the sheriff's letter, no farmer, mercer, or showman was molested on the way through Sherwood Forest. All was as quiet as if Robin Hood was a myth.

The outlaw gave no sign, left no track

of his presence, and although the forest was scoured day and night by armed men and spies, they received no complaint and heard not a word of the much-dreaded outlaw.

For this reason Oswald de Burgh became easier in his mind, but not a whit did he relax his vigilance.

Robin Hood was like a will-o'-the-wisp—here, there, and everywhere seemingly at the same time—and occasionally Oswald de Burgh had some particularly ugly dreams concerning the stalwart archer in Lincoln green.

Spies disguised as limping beggars, friars, soldiers of fortune, merchants, and yeomen haunted Sherwood Forest, but none brought the sheriff news that his much-feared enemy was near.

The fair opened on Monday morning with a display of grandeur and ceremony not dreamed of in these practical days, and then the buying and selling and the fun began.

The air rang with the din of beating drums and the ear-splitting braying of trumpets, the clattering of horses for sale, the yelling of showmen who were enhancing the wonders to be seen, and the shouts of the populace.

Here was a bout with quarter-staves going on, there a single-stick fight, and the twang of bows in the archery galleries was heard everywhere.

The people made way for Oswald de Burgh as he passed through the busy scene. Some doffed their caps and cheered, but his reception was so half-hearted that he could but notice it.

Suddenly came the cry, "A witch! a witch! Duck her in the pond! She'll float, I'll warrant. Burn her!"

"Here's sport," said Oswald de Burgh, turning to a friend.

"Ay!" roared a brawny fellow. "Let the sheriff deal with her. I trow that she will get justice at his hands."

A wretched old woman, wrinkled and bent, drawn to the fair in the hope of picking up a few groats, was being dragged hither and thither by the crowd.

"Bring the crone to me," Oswald de Burgh commanded.

Bruised, beaten, and in worse rags

than she had brought on her aching back, the poor creature was hustled before the sheriff.

"Oh, sir!" she cried, falling on her knees, "I do no harm. I am no witch, but a good Christian. My only crime is my poverty. Save me—save me!"

"And yet methinks you have the evil eye," Oswald de Burgh said, regarding her without pity. "What else but mischief should bring an old woman like you here?"

"Charity, good sir. I am starving. I have tasted neither bit nor sup since yestere'en."

"Children of the Evil One can live without eating or drinking!" howled a half-drunken wretch. "Deal with her sternly, sheriff. Order her to the pond."

"Nay," said Oswald de Burgh. "I am in a merciful mood to-day. Listen, old woman. These good, law-abiding people believe you to be a witch, and that there are miscreants who deal in the black arts we know too well. Yes," glaring at her, "you have the evil eye, and I sentence you to be flogged at the public whipping-post, and banished from the town forthwith. Give her twenty lashes."

The whipping-post and gibbet occupied prominent positions in the market-place, and the executioner was always ready.

He was a hunchbacked, evil-visaged villain, and stepping promptly forward he seized the old woman's wrists in a grip so fierce that she screamed with pain.

"Come, mother, and take your reward," he growled. "A groat a lash is my pay. Hey, it is not a bad beginning. If things go on as they have begun I shall have a wallet full of silver ere the fair is done."

"As you hope for mercy in heaven, have mercy upon me!" the poor old soul shrieked frantically. "Oh! has it come to this, after seventy years of hardships and suffering?"

"Take her away and get your work over quickly, executioner," ordered Oswald de Burgh, stopping his ears with his fingers.

But the victim struggled with such

violence that, strong as he was, the executioner was compelled to call for assistance.

"I'll teach you to dance, you hag!" he hissed, as she was dragged inch by inch towards the whipping-post.

Scarce had he spoken when a stone came hurtling through the air. It struck the brute between the eyes with such tremendous force that he fell headlong to the ground, where he lay quite unconscious.

That the missile had come from a sling there was no doubt, and so sudden was the deed that silence fell on the throng as though the crack of doom had sounded.

The old woman lay shivering and sobbing. She was so intent upon her own miserable condition that she could not comprehend what had happened.

Then came a murmur. It increased to a savage roar of discordant cries.

"The Evil One has done this! Strike her head off! Ho, there! bring faggots and let her burn!"

Oswald de Burgh stood like a man in a maze. None could tell who threw the stone. It had come like a bolt from the blue, and though the sun shone scorching hot about him, his whole body was like ice. It might be his turn next, and fear seized him.

"Bear the fellow away, and let the old crone go," he said. "Ten nobles to the man who discovers the murderer of the executioner."

Another stone! It came whizzing through the air, missing the sheriff by the breadth of a hair.

"The tyrant bears a charmed life!" shouted a lusty voice.

Then all was confusion. The people swayed, broke, and fled, carrying everything before them.

Stalls were overturned, men shouted, women screamed and fainted, and even the cattle in the space beyond the pleasure fair partook of the fright and, breaking loose, tore about as though they were indeed bewitched.

And then arose another cry.

"A bull! A mad bull! Look out for the bull!"

It was no false alarm. Charging

upon the surging people thundered a bull as black as night, head down, tail erect, its eyes blazing fury, and its foaming nostrils breathing death and destruction.

At such a time no respect for persons could be observed, and Oswald de Burgh, separated from his companions and hustled hither and thither, found himself in a direct line with the infuriated animal.

In his terror he turned to flee, but too late. Tossed in the air, the Norman went helplessly up, and fell to the ground stunned and senseless.

The bull was satisfied with this performance, and surrendered to its owner. Then someone cried out that the old woman was gone, but little heed was paid to the cry.

Oswald de Burgh was borne away to his castle, where he lay, as it were, on a bed of sword-points, and so serious was his condition that orders were given to stop the fair.

It was not until late in the evening that it was resumed; but Nottingham Fair had started badly, and wiseacres shook their heads saying that this was but the beginning of a series of catastrophes. Some wished themselves well home again.

"The old woman was the sheriff's familiar spirit, and he knew it not," one man growled. "Forsooth, the Evil One comes in so many forms that no one knows when he is walking at his side. Friend"—turning to his companion—"here is an inn. Let us see what the quality of the ale is like."

It was an old-fashioned house, with a huge kitchen. The walls were black with smoke and grimy with grease, but as the room was only used by the common company, no one cared.

Seated on one of the roughly-hewn benches was a man attired and equipped as a horse-dealer. The lash of a long whip trailed at his feet, and a halter lay beside him. He sat aloof from a number of others gathered at the table drinking and talking noisily, and judging by his demeanour he wished to be left severely alone.

Now and then he would turn his head

towards the others, but he gave no sign that he was interested in their doings.

He was drinking mead, a beverage much beloved by the Saxons; but he drank sparingly, and at long intervals.

People came and went. Now a soldier, or a yeoman morose at the bad bargains he had made, tried to draw him into conversation; but he answered only in monosyllables, and at length all left him for a surly fellow and one not worth bestowing a word upon.

But he became more communicative when a stout, bearded man, bearing a long staff, entered the kitchen and plumped down at his side.

The newcomer was so exceedingly stout that his belt was let out to the last buckling hole, and his round, button-like nose shone as if it had been polished.

"Strange doings to-day, neighbour," he said.

"Ay, ay," replied the other. "There are people who say that the old woman turned into a black bull, which made a mistake of tossing Oswald de Burgh upwards instead of downwards."

"Hey, but that's rather strong language," broke in a third man, peering out of a dark corner.

"As strong as the ale which has set your tongue wagging suddenly," the horse-dealer retorted.

"Ha, ha! ho, ho, ho!" laughed the fat man.

"How now, meal-tub, what ails you?" demanded the man in the corner.

"Better be like a meal-tub than a banner-staff."

The man in the corner rose. He was lean, long, and lantern-jawed.

"You must have good eyes to measure the length of a man when he is sitting down," he said angrily. "My name is Mould, and I'm ready to uphold that name as an honest one."

"And my name is Church," replied the portly individual. "And it seems to me that if you do not mind your own affairs, and keep a civil tongue in your head, there will be some churchyard mould for one of us."

A roar of laughter greeted this sally, and Mould took it with very ill grace.

"I'd not have the burying of you," he said, looking very sheepish. "But for your beard, you would remind me of —of—"

"Say on," said Church. "Stammering sits ill on a man with a head made to bleat like a sheep."

"You would remind me of that rascally priest, Friar Tuck," Mould blurted out.

"Friar Tuck! And pray where did you meet him?"

"In Sherwood Forest. The base knave robbed me of all, save what I stood in."

"And you allowed him to do it?" Church sneered.

"How could I help myself when Robin Hood and Little John held me against a tree, and threatened to murder me if I uttered a cry?"

"Ho, there, landlord!" Church cried; "a measure of drink for a first-class liar; and get another ready, for I see he has not done yet."

The horse-dealer, exploding with laughter, leaned so far over the bench that his tunic partly opened, revealing a flash of green; but it passed unnoticed by all save Church, who at once whispered a word into the mirth-stricken man's ear.

It so happened that Mould was an assumed name. The man was one of Oswald de Burgh's spies, and mean as he was in spirit, it did not suit him to be browbeaten in a room full of company.

"Who are you to call me a liar?" he demanded fiercely.

"One that would not give the core of a rotten apple for your word," Church replied calmly. "I have never met Friar Tuck, nor has he ever come behind me, and that I swear; but I vow that he has never touched you."

"How know you that?" Mould asked.

"For the best of reasons. He told me so with his own lips," came the astonishing reply.

"You talk in riddles, man. Only just now you said that you never met Friar Tuck."

"That's as true as I am a sinner," Church replied. "Think the riddle

out. Sit down quietly, and do what you have been sent here for."

"What is that?"

"To poke your nose into the business of other people and to join in conversation that does not concern you."

Mould winced and turned all sorts of colours, for all eyes were focussed on him now. He knew that he was found out, and made a move towards the door.

"What!" quoth Church. "Will you leave good ale to turn flat and stale? I always heard it said that drink and lying go well together."

There was another roar of laughter, and Mould, turning, aimed a blow at his tormentor. Church ducked his head, and what was intended for him was received by the horse-dealer.

In a moment the latter was on his feet and had Mould by the throat.

"The blow was not intended for you," Mould cried, as well as his chattering teeth would allow him.

"That may be!" thundered the horse-dealer, still shaking the man; "but nathless, I got it. Here is something you may not count as an accident."

Lifting Mould bodily off the ground, he swung him to and fro, and then hurled him so far out of the house that he struck against the wall on the opposite side of the narrow street.

Mould picked himself up, hoping to hear a commotion at the inn. But all was quiet. There were no sounds indicative of either applause or disapproval.

"What a fool I am!" he said. "The fat man with the beard said that he had spoken with Friar Tuck, although he had never met him. 'Tis plain enough he is Friar Tuck himself. Patience! I'll have revenge! The soldiers are not far away."

Creeping to one of the gates of the city he gave the alarm, and it was passed along. In a few minutes all the gates of Nottingham were closed, barred, locked, and bolted. No man could leave Nottingham that night without submitting to the strictest scrutiny.

And soon a band of soldiers were on

the move. In due time they reached the inn, Mould sneaking behind them, and at the word of command they surrounded the house.

The landlord met their leader at the door with uplifted hands.

"Great heavens! what has happened that you come here in warlike array?" he cried.

"Stand from my path!" commanded the captain sternly. "There are at least two men in your house that I desire to see."

"Enter, with pleasure!"—skipping nimbly aside. "I encourage none but honest folks here."

The soldiers poured into the kitchen and saw no men there answering the description given by Mould.

"Now, sirrah!" blustered the captain, "the men I seek must be hidden away. One is fat and burly, the other is a horse-dealer, and carries both whip and halter."

"My faith!" exclaimed the landlord. "Glad enough was I to see the backs of the wastrels. Only just now they walked off arm-in-arm towards the western gate."

"That is true enough," chimed in one of the customers. "The man who called himself by the name of Church said that he was going to look for Friar Tuck."

The captain was too old a bird to be caught with chaff, and insisted on searching the premises. The landlord made not the least objection, and every room from attic to cellar was searched thoroughly.

"In any case," growled the captain, as he formed his men outside, "these fellows must be in the town, and we will run them to earth."

At the time he was talking a wain, or wagon, heavily laden with wool packs, and drawn by four horses, halted at the eastern gate.

"Ho, ho! Keeper of the gate, let me pass through!" shouted the driver, climbing down.

"Not so fast," said the gate-keeper. "What's your name?"

"William Jocelyn."

"Whither bound?"

"To Shemsall. Every man, woman, and child knows me there."

The gate-keeper held up his lantern and gazed steadily in Jocelyn's face.

"Well, friend," he said at length, "I wish you a safe journey. Stay yet a moment."

Drawing his sword, he thrust it again and again into the wool packs.

"By St. Etheldreda! 'tis enough to make the ghosts of the sheep that wore the fleeces cry out," Jocelyn said, laughing. "Have done, good gate-keeper, or the goods will be damaged."

"All's well. Pass on, and good-night," throwing open the gate.

The driver whistled to his horses, cracked his whip, and the wain rumbled along on its journey, melting away into the darkness of the night—on and on until the forest was reached.

Then, as it came to standstill, the tail of the wain flew back, and Church and the horse-dealer leaped into the road.

They were no other than Friar Tuck and Robin Hood.

Following them came half a dozen sturdy fellows, who stood silent while Robin Hood dismissed the driver with such a reward that he gasped for joy.

"Friar," said Robin Hood, "we did not go to Nottingham Fair for nothing. You saw the poor old dame out of the town?"

"As I told you, with your present of five crowns," Friar Tuck replied. "By the rood, I thought she would go mad. She forgot all her bruises and her terrible fright, and had I not bundled her away she would have counted her beads ten times over."

"That is well," Robin Hood said, smiling. "Those crowns once belonged to Oswald de Burgh, and in such manner does good come out of evil. Will Scarlet."

The stalwart young forester stood forward.

"Give me your hand," said Robin Hood. "Never did I see stones twisted better out of a sling. The first was better than the second. But never mind; there is yet time—there is yet time."

Will Scarlet, sufficiently rewarded by his chief's praise, rejoined his companions, and soon all vanished in the gloom of the forest.

CHAPTER 5.

The Fighting Ghost that Haunted Sherwood Forest.

ONE morning a man was found dead in the forest. He was short of stature, round of face, and garbed in brown.

How he had come by his death none could tell. There were no marks of violence on him; his body was well nourished; he had money in his purse and a silver crucifix, held by a chain of gold, round his neck.

Beyond a doubt his untimely end was caused by failure of the action of the heart, and such would have been the verdict in these days of better understanding.

It so happened that the body was discovered near where Friar Tuck had his strange encounter with the two Normans, and it went forth that Friar Tuck was dead. The news travelled from mouth to mouth, and soon it reached Nottingham Castle, to the great joy of Oswald de Burgh.

He was disappointed that the mortal remains had not been brought to him, but the people had buried them out of sight, and the sheriff had to be content that one of his most potent enemies would trouble him no more.

So great was his joy that he gave every man a flagon of wine, and issued orders for a feast on a grand scale, sending out invitations far and wide.

Now seemed the time to capture Robin Hood and break up his band. Naturally enough, the foresters would observe a season of sorrow for their beloved friar, and they would pay visits to the place where he was buried.

The interment had taken place in a quaint little churchyard, and many people attended the funeral; but the spies who were there in numbers could point to no person likely to have anything to do with the outlaw.

Among the men sent by Prince John from London to strengthen De Burgh was a man named Coquelle, a renowned scout, and as cunning as a fox.

Dressed as a rich dealer in cattle, and furnished with plenty of money, Coquelle came to Nottingham, but held aloof from the castle or any person

dwelling there. He conducted his business by messenger, and in a cipher which no one but Oswald de Burgh's scrivener and himself could understand.

This was done in the dead of night, and so secretly that the messenger had instructions to turn back if he were met or overtaken by any man.

Coquelle gave out that he had come from Cumberland and had decided to look about him until the autumn, when the great sales of cattle were in full swing. He stood over six feet, boasted of his strength, feared nothing, and pretended to side with the foresters, although he was a Norman from the crown of his head to his toes.

"The Sheriff of Nottingham," he was wont to say, "cannot see any further than his nose, or he would take these people by the hands, make friends, and redress their grievances."

But all the time the wily Coquelle was on the lookout, and hanging on the words of every man that got into conversation with him.

Under his clothes, which were of good material and cut, he wore a suit of armour, and believing himself to be arrow and dagger proof he swaggered about, spending money freely and plying the labouring people with drink, under the plea of gaining information from them as to who possessed the best beasts.

But soon Coquelle grew impatient. He was giving no return for the heavy fees paid to him, and Oswald de Burgh hinted openly more than once that Prince John had sent him a dressed-up doll instead of a clever man.

It was on a Thursday night. The warning notes of the curfew bell had plunged Nottingham and the surrounding villages into darkness, and nothing was heard except the sleepy lowing of cattle, and the watch-dogs answering each other.

An hour passed.

"Past nine o'clock! A cloudy night! All's well!" sang a watchman.

Several men wrapped in heavy cloaks appeared before him.

Their leader, Coquelle, whispered a few words in the watchman's ear and again he droned out:

"Past nine o'clock. A cloudy night! All's well!"

Then from the castle a number of horses, with their hoofs muffled with tightly compressed wisps of hay, were brought out. The men mounted and rode away.

Coquelle had received an anonymous letter, stating that Robin Hood had decided to steal the body of Friar Tuck and convey it deep into the heart of the forest. So at last the outlaw was to be caught in a trap.

The master spy's orders were to bring Robin Hood back alive if possible, and for that purpose he had provided himself with cords and a net, with meshes of fine, wrought-steel wire which no dagger would cut through.

Coquelle was confident and jubilant.

A light breeze tempered the sultry air, through which now and then leaped sheet lightning, sending the squeaking bats and hooting owls back into the darkness they loved.

Through glade, dell, and avenue rode Coquelle and his picked men, exchanging no word. Their horses, too, were well trained, and scarcely champed the bits that chafed them.

When within half a mile of the churchyard where lay the remains of poor Friar Tuck, the men halted, tethered their horses, and threw aside their cloaks.

They wore black armour, helmets with the visors half-raised, and each carried a well-tested and keenly-sharpened sword and dagger fresh from the sheriff's armoury.

A low wall ran round the burial-ground, and the long grass grew round the flat slabs of stone covering the dead.

Here and there were mounds telling of recent funerals, and around all dark and stately trees bowed their leafy heads, as if in sorrow for the departed.

Coquelle followed the time-honoured style of listening with his ear flat to the ground. He heard many sounds that did not interest him. Rabbits scampered in the grass, and a hundred insects, such as hunt by night, rustled; but there was one sound he could not understand.

It was a puffing and gasping, such as

a blown animal makes. Came also another sound, a kind of shuffling, as if someone were sneaking across the graveyard.

"Now," thought Coquelle, "is the time for me to distinguish myself. The body-snatchers are somewhere amongst those trees, and Heaven send that Robin Hood is with them!"

Acting on instructions already given his men began to invest the churchyard, creeping round under the shadow of the wall, while Coquelle, crawling over it, wriggled to within a few yards of where he thought the friar lay sleeping his long last sleep.

Suddenly Coquelle's blood began to run cold, and his hair bristled, for right in front of him rose a ghastly form, clad in white and flickering all over with a bluish flame, like blue mould in a state of ignition.

In size the spectre was that of Friar Tuck, but the face, once so smiling and jolly, was now truly horrible for mortal to gaze upon.

"Who comes hither to disturb the dead?" demanded the spectre, his voice hollow and ghostly.

Coquelle's teeth chattered in his head, and, although half-dead with fright, he was conscious of the fact that his followers were gliding away and making for their horses in a most expeditious fashion.

And now—horror of horrors!—the spectre, lifting up its dreadful grave-clothes, began to dance towards him.

The spy called upon all the saints he could think of, and prayed that he might wake to find it all a dream. But it was only too real.

The ghost—the dreadful ghost—came prancing towards him, chanting in a blood-curdling voice:

"Norman, Norman, base and foul,
Greedy, grasping, groping ghoul,
Down among the dead men come."

Every ounce of strength had left Coquelle, his courage gone out at his finger-ends. He choked, panted, and gurgled, getting no further than "Mercy! Mercy!"

"Mercy? Ho, ho!" mumbled the ghost. "Such mercy as you have shown

to others shall be shown to you. Come, come! Down among the dead men come!"

Coquelle could bear no more. His sword fell from his nerveless grasp, and rolling over on the grass he swooned.

How long he remained senseless he knew not. A mighty roar of laughter brought him back to consciousness.

Like a flash the horrors of the graveyard rushed into his brain, and believing that he was in the company of fiends he kept his eyes tightly closed.

"By the life we lead and love," exclaimed a voice, "you shall fight him well and fairly, Sir Ghost."

Coquelle opened his eyes and started.

He was lying under a tree. The light of torches flashed on his face, and as in a vision he saw men passing to and fro; men lying in grotesque attitudes on the grass; pretty maidens chatting with the men; but all these were nothing in comparison with the two men who sat at Coquelle's feet, and on these his eyes were soon riveted.

One was Friar Tuck, very solid, rosy of cheek, and his lips bubbling with laughter; and the other was, beyond a doubt, Robin Hood.

"Well, sir," said the outlaw, "so you were anxious to make our acquaintance. Marry, it was an odd freak of yours to fall asleep in a churchyard. Had you come straight to our leafy place you would have saved us much trouble."

"So," growled Coquelle, glaring at Friar Tuck, "I was tricked into the belief that I saw a ghost."

"Your means are foul, but ours are fair," Robin Hood retorted severely. "See, you are unbound. You have still your sword, and no harm has come to you. What more would you have?"

"I must be thankful for small mercies."

"You would have shown me none at all," Robin Hood retorted. "Your master waits in vain to see me dragged before him. The dungeon gapes, but it is empty. Varlet in the pay of a villain, if I did right in the sight of Heaven, I should hang you. But I have other plans. Sir Ghost here," pointing to Friar Tuck, "desires to engage you with single-stick and buck-

ler, and if he gives you not a sound drubbing I have mistaken my man."

"And what then?" Coquelle demanded.

"I will put a mark on you that I may know you again—that every forester when he meets you may cry out, 'Here comes a spy; beware of him.'"

"What! would you brand me with a hot-iron?" Coquelle demanded, aghast.

"Nay," Robin Hood replied; "such dastard work I leave to the Normans. I will but have your skin pricked and rubbed with the juice of a plant I know of. Fear not; the work shall be done skilfully."

Coquelle winced, and his heart sank lower.

"If gold will help you to relent of your purpose——"

"Ah!" Friar Tuck interrupted, "I thought we should hear of gold. How readily it flows from the Norman when he smells fear! My faith, Robin Hood, you forgot to tell him that he has no longer a purse."

"Yet it will comfort him to know that the money will go to feed the children of the poor," Robin Hood remarked slyly. "But up, Coquelle the Great, and you, too, friar. It is time that we looked to this bout with single-sticks. Ho, there, Little John, my chicken, bring our guest something to make the colour walk in his face again."

And now Coquelle saw that the men were forming a ring, leaning in easy attitudes on their long bows and discussing with many a peal of merry laughter the probable ending of the fight.

"I'll wager my best Sunday tunic of satin against a bow-string that the friar makes him howl in less time than it takes to count fifty," cried Much the Miller's son.

"Be not too sure of that," Robin Hood said. "Our guest with so sour a face is well skilled in arms, while Friar Tuck is——"

"A man of peace, a lamb, a flower," Friar Tuck interrupted.

Coquelle took comfort. As we know, under his outer garments he was in the habit of wearing mail, but dismay fell upon him when he discovered that

during his swoon it had been removed, and he wore no more than the ordinary clothes of a yeoman.

Stout sticks with basket handles and wooden bucklers were brought and thrown down on the grass.

"Choose first," said Robin Hood, "and lay on hard, for the friar has a thick skull as well as a fiery temper."

"A fiery temper!" groaned the monk. "I! Look at me! By the rood, Robin, you have set me a task that may cause plenty of laughter, and me a cracked head."

Coquelle made his selection with great deliberation. He was no novice at sword play, and feeling assured that no mean advantage would be taken of him he vowed to do his best.

"Oh, fool, fool! not to make sure that it was this fat wretch who was buried," he thought as the men made the forest ring again in the very abandonment of their noisy mirth.

Their laughter enraged him. He towered head and shoulders over Friar Tuck, but here was this tub of a man dancing about, daring him to come on, giving him no peace.

Watching his opportunity, Coquelle presently rushed forward and delivered a swashing blow. Friar Tuck sat down flat, the stick whizzed over his head, and the next moment Coquelle was dancing about like a cat on hot bricks.

The friar had cut him sharply on the shins, and was now up on his feet again, prancing about as before.

"Call that swordsmanship," Coquelle groaned. "It is not lawful to strike a man below the knee."

"That shows you are not acquainted with forest laws," Friar Tuck replied. "When pitted against big odds we fight how we can. On, on! I will try a higher touch next time."

Little John was so convulsed that he lay on his broad back kicking up his heels, and the girls' silvery laughter made music that was anything but tune-ful to Coquelle's ears.

If he could but get in one blow, only one, he would repay Friar Tuck.

"Come, my boy, why don't you hit me?" cried the friar in exasperating tones. "Am I not waiting for you?"

Here is my shaven crown making a grand target. Hit at it, man! Hit at it, and see whether it be harder than your stick."

Coquelle feinted, lunged, parried, and then down came his stick. It really looked as though the friar must suffer this time, but his head rolled on one side as if it would fly off his shoulders, and Coquelle received a crack on the cheek that sent him staggering across the ring.

Little John rose and, setting the spy upon his knee while wiping the blood from his face, said:

"Norman, I fear that you will have but sorry features to take back to your master. Let me give you a word of advice: Let the friar attack, and do you act on the defence until you get a chance of making the old man laugh on the other side of his face."

Coquelle knew that the giant was poking fun at him, and that made him feel the absurdity of his position.

Will Scarlet generously brought him a draught of wine, but, when offered one as well, Friar Tuck refused it.

"I'll drink presently," he said. "Now then, sir; no dallying."

Disdaining Little John's advice, Coquelle drew a deep breath, and gripping his single-stick viciously went hammer and tongs at his opponent.

Friar Tuck withstood the attack like a rock. The sticks rattled on each other and crashed on the wooden shields, until that borne by Coquelle flew apart.

Another was brought to him, and the combat went on.

Coquelle, white and streaked with blood, looked like a fiend. Friar Tuck began to puff and blow, but never once did he lose his coolness or his nerve.

Now and then Coquelle got a blow in, but never on the head of the friar, who was waiting to deliver the coup-de-grâce.

The opportunity came at last. The friar's stick seemed to quiver in the air, and then down it came with unerring aim, and Coquelle, giving a gasping cry, dropped like a stone.

"By the rood!" declared Robin Hood, "methinks you have killed the man. Bring him hither, Little John."

"He ails but little," the giant replied,

raising Coquelle in his arms. "See, his eyelids are moving, and his heart beats fast enough."

Ned Carter now approached, and taking a phial from his pocket, poured a few drops of white fluid into the Norman's mouth.

"Raise his head on something, and lay him aside," Ned Carter said. "I'll warrant that he will sleep soundly for hours if needs be."

* * * * *

Sweet, fresh, and fair the morning dawned over the good old town of Nottingham. The watchman, tired of prowling and calling the hours, had gone to his bed, and the streets were as deserted as though they were in a city of the dead.

But there were life and animation in the house taken for a term by Coquelle.

The men who had gone with him to capture Robin Hood were there, quarrelling, jangling, and blaming each other.

"It was you who took first to your heels, and I that ran to stop you, but you were much too fleet of foot!" one cried.

"Nay," another hissed. "You were in front of me all the time."

More than once during the still hours they had come to blows, but still they continued to use their tongues.

Where was Coquelle? What had become of him? Go back to Nottingham Castle, where the axe and rope were always ready, they dare not.

No; they must wait until their master returned and concoct some sort of story for Oswald de Burgh—a story that would hoodwink him.

And all the while a cart, drawn by a swift horse, was rattling through the forest, and Coquelle, with the lower part of his face bandaged, sat bound within it, and lolling from side to side with the motion of the vehicle.

When the cart reached the extreme borders of the forest, Coquelle was taken from the cart and his limbs unbound, but bandages remained over his eyes, nor was he allowed to remove them until some minutes had passed.

Standing half-dazed and wondering if it could all be true, his brain began

to surge and reel; but at last, tearing the bandages from his face and howling like a wild animal, he rushed off and made his way to his house, where he burst with the fury of a hurricane among his men.

He appeared to them like some dreadful apparition. On his brow was the letter S, stamped in blood and indelible.

Terrified, they fell back before him.

By the blazing of his eyes, by the gnashing of his teeth, and by the frantic manner in which he grasped for the sword which no longer hung at his side, they saw what had happened.

Coquelle, the spy, was mad, hopelessly mad, and darting past him they left him to yell and rave, until, foaming at the mouth, he dashed himself against the wall and fell quivering on the floor like a crushed snake.

CHAPTER 6.

The False Robin Hood.

It came to Robin Hood's ears that he had a rival in the field. A ruffian adopting his name had collected a band of the scum of Nottingham, and was playing havoc among the cottagers and small farmers.

Robin Hood determined to put an end to this state of things with all expedition; but his imitator, whose real name was Rudolf Fayer, hailing from Burgundy, was crafty and hard to catch.

It was only when Robin Hood and his men had gained their end in some achievement, and retired for a while to rest, that Rudolf Fayer appeared with fire and sword, leaving death and destruction in his wake.

It was whispered in certain quarters that Oswald de Burgh was hand and glove with this ruffian.

At all events, the people in small outlying villages quaked in their shoes, and while the sun was yet in the sky houses were closed and barricaded, and uneasy were the dreams of the poor folks, who heard in every gust of wind the voice of the terrible brigand.

Through one of these villages ran a swift stream, with here and there a water-mill to which the farmers took their corn.

A terrible storm had wrecked one of these mills. The lightning had riven its roof, and passing down, struck the miller dead and smashed certain portions of the machinery.

From that day it was left, and avoided as a place of evil. The miller had been a hard, grasping man, and the judgment of Heaven had fallen upon him, so the people said.

As time went on the roof fell in, weeds and fringe blocked the wheel, and the water, finding its own level, ran round the ruins instead of under them. Soon blood-curdling stories went around concerning the mill.

It was haunted. Uncanny lights illumined it, weird forms stole along the rickety bridge, ghostly faces were seen at the windows, and terrible sounds like the agonised cries of lost souls were heard above the howling of the wind and the dismal rolling of thunder.

One evening when the sun had gone down behind a bank of scudding clouds, a man, walking by the side of a heavily-laden ass, came that way.

He carried on his own back a pack. He limped painfully, for his feet were bare and his journey had been over rough, stony paths. Judging by his appearances he was a pedlar, and albeit his clothes were in rags he had not forgotten to fortify himself with good fare. And small wonder, for there were always food and drink for the pedlar, who was often a handy man, and in some cases was counted wise because he could read and write.

This pedlar was short of stature. He wore on his head a great flapping cap that came down over his ears and gave his face a comical, woebegone expression.

"Ah, me!" he said aloud, "what a miserable life it is I lead. Misfortune has directed me to this deserted spot. What place is this, I wonder? I like not the look of it, but any shelter is better than none."

Shaking out a bag of corn and chaff for the benefit of the donkey, the pedlar climbed the steps leading to the ruined mill, and peered in.

There was no one to say him yea or nay. The door hung on one rusty

hinge, some of the floor boards were gone, and rats and mice, disturbed at his approach, scampered away. A great bat flapped its leather wings in his face, and an owl, sitting upon a beam from which a rusty chain hung, hooted at him; but the belated traveler took no notice.

Uninviting though the place was the pedlar had made up his mind to stay there that night, and returning to the bank of the stream he relieved the ass of much of its burden and carried the packages into the mill.

In one corner of the chamber was a heap of straw and litter. The pedlar sat down, and taking from his wallet a hunk of bread and cheese and a curiously shaped bottle he started munching and drinking contentedly.

Outside the darkness grew apace. The pedlar was provided with steel, tinder, and candle, and having procured a light he settled himself as easily as possible and began to sing for company's sake.

It was a song of the dim and mysterious cloister, the silent march of monks, and the solemn strains of the organ while the vesper bell is ringing.

At length, feeling inclined to sleep, he pillowed his head on his arm and, closing his eyes, began to snore loudly.

And now the wind was sighing and moaning through the trees most dimly, but the pedlar was much too weary to be disturbed by such sounds. He snored on, unconscious that through one of the windows several pairs of eyes were glaring at him. The owners of those eyes were clad in green tunics and hose, high, rusty boots, and hats with broken feathers—a ramshackle, unshaven, dilapidated crew.

They had a good view of the pedlar, for as he had sung for company's sake, so had he left the candle alight, jammed into an iron socket and so incapable of doing harm although it burnt down to the end of its wick.

The eyes vanished from the window, and the men stole one by one into the chamber.

The leader, who was no other than Rudolf Fayer, crept close to the sleeping pedlar.

The man next behind him touched his arm.

"Do the varlet no hurt yet," he whispered. "The fat fool may be able to give us some information worth the acting upon. Wake him up. If he has goods as well as money I trow that he will be glad to part with them to—ha, ha!—Robin Hood!"

"Peace, loon," Fayer said, under his breath. "Why do you always laugh when you call me by that name? Take care that sniggering does not cost you your life one of these days."

The pedlar woke upon his own account.

"Pardon," he said, addressing himself humbly to Rudolf Fayer; "I did not know that I was intruding. I lost my way, and—"

"Say no more," Fayer interrupted. "I am master not only of this mill, but of many a broad acre. Doubtless you can pay for your lodging?"

The pedlar began to tremble.

"I am a man of—a poor man," he replied, "with but few groats to call my own. My business is to sell odds and ends, as you may judge by what you see around you. May I inquire your name, sir?"

"I am Robin Hood, King of Sherwood Forest," Rudolf Fayer replied.

"Then I am safe, for Robin Hood is a good, kind man. But where are the others I have heard spoken of—Little John and Friar Tuck?"

"They have further business on hand," Fayer growled. "My present concern is for you. As you say, I am good and kind by nature, but still I do not scruple to take toll. Come, we shall be better friends when I have weighed your purse in my hand. See what the packs contain," he added, turning to the others.

They were already at work, and the floor was strewn with odds and ends such as the humble people purchased readily.

"A scurvy lot of rubbish," Rudolph said contemptuously. "Now then, pedlar, your purse, or you will find that Robin Hood's heart can harden very quickly."

"Mercy on me!" cried the pedlar. "I

did not expect such treatment as this. Here is my purse, but I pray you take not all. Oh, Heaven! Darkness has fallen on us."

The candle had gone out most mysteriously. It had been placed where no draught of air could catch it, yet it was extinguished as if by a sudden gust.

"A malison on the light," Rudolf growled. "Procure another without delay. Out with your steel and tinder—quick!—or I will lay about with my sword. Curses on you, for laggards! There is more in putting out the candle than I like."

The clink of steel fell on flint, a few sparks streamed out, the tinder caught, and the candle was relighted.

But where was the pedlar? He had gone—vanished, as it were, into empty air.

Two of Fayer's ruffians rushed from the mill. They were shouting that the ass was gone too when they seemed to be struck by thunderbolts, and fell over each other.

Who delivered the terrific blows they received it was impossible to tell, as the night was as black as pitch.

One crawled in a semi-conscious state back to the mill, and displayed his much cracked head to the astounded Fayer.

"By Pluto!" he said; "that fellow is a warrior, instead of a poverty-stricken pedlar. But how in the name of wonder did a man with such a bulky frame as his contrive to slip past us? As for what he has left behind, it is not worth a dozen groats. Hark! what is that?"

"A nightjar on the wing," said one of the men. "I know the note well."

Fayer sat down on the very spot recently occupied by the pedlar, and presently his eyes were attracted by a small piece of parchment.

"Ho, there, Sweyn!" he cried out. "You can read. Tell us what is on this scrap of sheepskin."

A huge Dane, with a beard as black as the night, stepped forward. Taking the parchment in his hand, he spelt slowly the words:

"I sell laces, and rings, and womanly things;
Give blows and cracks on the head;
And I'm the friar, plump, round, and good,
The best of friends with Robin Hood."

"Now, by the fiends! we know how we have been taken in," Rudolf Fayer cried, stamping his feet with fury. "The fellow has no small stock of courage to come here alone. But he cannot be far away, so after him."

"But he is mounted," Sweyn remarked.

"On an ass," Fayer growled. "If I have not men who can travel swifter on foot than an ass, then I am a leader of asses."

They were all rushing out when Rudolf Fayer called them back.

"I do not care to be quite alone," he said, motioning to some of them to stay. "Hasten after him, you others, and trouble not to bring him back. You know how to deal with him."

"Only too well," Sweyn said, tapping the hilt of his sword.

Fayer went to the window and listened until the footsteps of the men in pursuit died away. Then he filled up the aperture with rubbish, for a storm was rising. The wind came first, and then the thunder and lightning. Rain fell with the noise of a roaring cataract, and the air was filled with vivid flashes and awful sounds.

In the meantime, Sweyn and his companions were having none too happy a time. Drenched to the skin, blinded by the glare of the lightning, and deafened by the crashing thunder, they missed each other, and presently Sweyn found himself alone.

There was no shelter save that afforded by the trees, and it was dangerous to linger under them.

Water ran over his ankles, the wind buffeted him, and at length, for sheer want of breath, he was compelled to stop.

As he did so he saw a donkey standing beneath an oak. He had no doubt but that it was the same animal brought near the mill by the pretended pedlar.

The ass had been deserted while the man sought shelter, so at least Sweyn thought; and thankful of any means of getting along, Sweyn leaped on the donkey's back and struck his heels against its sides.

But not an inch did the ass move. It merely pricked its ears and looked

round, as if wondering what was the matter.

"On, brute, on, or I will see how you like the point of my dagger!" Sweyn bellowed.

The ass gave a playful kick with one of its hind legs and began to bray.

"Curses on you, and all that came before you!" Sweyn hissed, drawing his dagger. "I'll teach you to sing a better song than that."

Then the donkey seemed to laugh like a human being.

"A second Balaam, as I live!" exclaimed Sweyn, in a fright.

"And Balaam is his name," said a voice.

At the same moment a noose was thrown over Sweyn's head and drawn tight.

"Now, my friend," said the pedlar, or, rather, Friar Tuck, dropping from the tree, staff in hand, "you have my permission to get away as soon as you can; but hold up your arms first, or by the rood you'll regret it!"

Just then the friar's staff whizzed so close to Sweyn's nose that his arms shot up, and in a moment he sat disarmed, helpless, and not daring to move.

"And now, Balaam," said Friar Tuck, "you have borne me well, but I have still further use for you. Our good friends, Robin Hood, Little John, and a score more who hold us in esteem are not far away, so it is time that we went to meet them."

"Heaven have mercy on me! I am a dead man!" Sweyn groaned.

"Not yet," Friar Tuck replied, complacently. "Friend, I fear you are in a sorry fix, but the fault is all your own."

"Listen, good friar——"

"Call me a man of peace."

"Listen, most excellent man of peace and love, for that I see you are," Sweyn gasped. "Rudolf Fayer is my leader."

"Tell me news I am ignorant of," said the friar.

"He is a hard man and a villain."

"Heaven bless us, can it be possible?" Friar Tuck rejoined. "Oh, this world—this wicked world!"

"He enlists men under the pretence of doing good work, and then forces

them to rob the poor," went on the distracted wretch.

"Worse and worse," quoth the friar. "I could hardly have believed such things possible had I not heard them from your own truthful lips. Sorry I am that I cannot stay, but I must really get along. Come, Balaam, come. The storm is abating, and we shall have a pleasant journey, after all."

"No, no, no!" Sweyn shrieked, knowing that he would be in danger of hanging if the ass moved and left him suspended by the neck.

To his horror and amazement his arms were dragged down and pinioned at his sides, and a young forester stood at Friar Tuck's side.

"Will Scarlet," said the monk, "your coming is most opportune. Here is a man who has stolen an ass. What shall I do with him?"

"Is the ass your property?" Will Scarlet demanded.

"Ay. Balaam, beautiful creature of the glade, answer."

The ass brayed loudly.

"Even so," said Will Scarlet; "the ass is yours, so take him away. But yet a moment stay! This man seems to have a rope that does not belong to him, and methinks it needs tightening, lest he should run away with it altogether."

"You torture me!" Sweyn groaned.

"Villain!" Will Scarlet cried, "think of the many you and your fellow-miscreants have tortured! Think of the blazing homesteads, the despair of men, the agony of women, the children put to the sword or thrown back into the flames!"

Friar Tuck seized the ass by the bridle and gave it a slight tug. Balaam answered the signal, and gave a bound.

"So perish a murderer! Long life to Robin Hood, King of Sherwood Forest!" cried Will Scarlet.

"Amen to that!" quoth Friar Tuck, turning his back on the strangling miscreant. "Outraged Heaven sent the varlet my way, as I felt would happen. But there are other rascals abroad."

"Little John has accounted for two; and not one shall escape," Will Scarlet replied. "Back to the mill! Robin Hood has surrounded it with twice a

score of men, and Rudolf Fayer must die. Friar, you have done well."

"For a man of peace, yea," Friar Tuck responded. "But, truth to tell, Will, I'd rather fetch the life out of a man with my quarter-staff any day than hang him. But yonder villain deserved a dog's death."

Balaam signified his approval by thrusting his soft muzzle into his master's hand, and then gave another bray, which was presently answered by the sound of a horn.

A man, shielding his head with his arms, rushed past, shouting:

"Robin Hood is coming!"

"Two of his friends are here," replied Friar Tuck, fetching him down. "Friend, bear in mind the old saying that it is not wisdom to holloa until you are well out of the wood."

Little John appeared hard on the fallen man's heels, he having been in pursuit of the rascal. He laughed when he saw how the friar had floored his man, and the three friends then made their way to the mill.

The storm was fast abating, although rain still fell steadily, but the lightning had lost its fierceness and the thunder muttered and rumbled low down in the sky.

Now and then a flash lit up the mill, in which Rudolf Fayer and three of his men were still sheltered.

At the approach of Friar Tuck, who led the way on his faithful Balaam, Robin Hood started up from behind a clump of bushes and saluted him.

"We have a desperate villain to contend with," the outlaw said. "The ladder is narrow, and the balcony so rotten that it will not bear the weight of many men. Fayer will fight to the last, I know, and he is likely to prove a tough customer."

"Let me go alone and deal with him," said Little John.

"No," Robin Hood replied. "He would hack you down as you entered the door, and I cannot afford to lose you. We must think of another plan."

Meanwhile, Fayer was waiting impatiently for Sweyn and the others who had gone in pursuit of Friar Tuck.

"There has been light enough in the

forest to see through it," he said. "What has happened to the dolts? If Sweyn has shown the white feather and left me, it were better for him that he had never been born. Death and confusion! what does it mean?"

Again sounded the cry of the night-jar on the wing. It came from Robin Hood's lips, and his men drew nearer and nearer to the mill.

"I like it not," Fayer went on. "Manon, go you outside and spy about you. Take your crossbow and axe, and look well to yourself."

The man shrugged his shoulders as he advanced to the narrow door.

"By St. Nicholas!" he said, "work of this dangerous kind always falls to my share."

"What, are you not satisfied with how I pay you?" Fayer demanded fiercely. "Do your duty, or methinks you will get another kind of wage that will either earn you a plot of ground or a resting-place in the bed of the river."

Manon made no reply, but his eyes flashed in an ugly manner as he pulled the door inwards.

Its solitary hinge gave way, and the door fell with a resounding crash. Manon stayed not to try to repair the damage, but fixing a bolt into his crossbow slipped out.

Not more than a hundred paces from him sat Friar Tuck on his donkey. A glimmer of lightning revealed him plainly, and Manon discharged the weapon without hesitation.

Never had Friar Tuck such a narrow escape. The bolt passed under his arm-pit, cutting away a portion of his tunic and inflicting a slight flesh-wound.

"A little higher," he cried out merrily, "and I should have been shaved for the last time."

Manon laughed, too, and was fixing another bolt when up went Robin Hood's bow, and away went a shaft as straight as ever arrow flew.

It struck Manon fairly between the eyes, and scarcely gasping out his death-cry he staggered forward and, slipping between the rails of the balcony, fell into the water.

CHAPTER 7.

More Work for Friar Tuck.

RUDOLF FAYER saw him disappear, but without knowing really what had happened.

"He's gone, and taken a score of good broad pieces of gold with him," he said, laughing brutally. "We must wait till daylight, and then go fishing under the old wheel, which will hold him fast enough."

Just then there rang out a voice that made him start and shiver.

"Rudolf Fayer," it cried, "I call upon you to surrender. You have run to the end of your tether, and must answer to the real King of Sherwood Forest."

"Death and the Evil One!" Fayer cried, "Robin Hood is here. But I will burn the mill over our heads rather than give in to him. Ho, there, you two, keep him at bay! Where is my axe? I have it. Now let him come, and I will cleave him from his crown to his shoulders."

An arrow hissed into the chamber and stuck quivering in the wall.

The men commanded to guard the doorway dared not move, but Rudolf Fayer, seeing his chance, thrust them forward, cut away the ladder, and roaring with fury, ran back.

Alone! His two men lay writhing on the rotten planks outside, but he paid no heed. Well he knew that, even if he had fifty men at his back, he was a doomed man. Robin Hood never did his work by halves.

"I yield to no man!" Fayer cried, crouching behind the doorway and raising his axe. "Come one, come all. Rather would I die a thousand deaths than fall into your hands."

"Obstinate fool," Robin Hood replied, "you are but prolonging your misery."

Fayer said that rather than surrender he would burn the mill down, and Robin Hood now determined to deprive him of light, then rush in and seize him.

Stealing up the debris of the smashed ladder, the outlaw got near enough to see a torch, which Rudolf Fayer had

ignited from the expiring candle. It was stuck in a socket.

Robin Hood shot an arrow and severed the torch in the middle. The flaming part fell forward, and in a moment some rubbish on the floor took fire.

Rudolf rushed to stamp it out, but fled again to his hiding-place behind the doorway, for arrows were now pouring in.

As if oil had been poured on the floor, so the fire spread. Higher and higher the flames leaped, with great licking tongues and volumes of smoke.

"Come forth!" Robin Hood shouted. "Better die like a man than stay there and be burnt to a cinder."

Rudolf Fayer set his teeth as he looked around him. Death in its most awful form stared him in the face. Outside, judgment and death, meted out by Robin Hood, awaited him.

He put his hand to his throat, grown hot and dry. A spurt of writhing, snakelike flame scorched his face.

Human nature could stand no more.

Ruthless villain as he was, he had done all that man could do, and reeling forward he staggered from the burning mill, still brandishing his axe and shouting defiance like a maniac.

Robin Hood commanded his men to put down their bows.

"I will give you time to repent," he cried to Fayer. "Leap down ere it be too late. The mill is doomed."

The roof fell in with a crash, and flames roared through every chink in the walls. Rudolf Fayer flung his axe at Robin Hood as a last sign of defiance, and leaped straight for the water.

Then an awful thing happened—how none could tell—but all shuddered whenever they spoke or thought of it afterwards.

The clogged wheel of the water-mill began to work, and the slimy floats fringed with long weeds seemed to stretch themselves, and like mighty claws to clutch the struggling man.

Rudolf Fayer saw his danger. Beating the water with his hands he turned his white, despairing face towards Robin Hood.

"For the love of Heaven," he cried, "do not let me drift under the wheel. I—I—I surrender."

For one of the few times of his life Robin Hood trembled as he drew an arrow from his quiver and fitted it to his bow. It was impossible to save Fayer from the cruel wheel; but he could give the villain a swifter and more merciful death.

Twang! Rudolf Fayer's head dropped and his body sank out of sight just as the great grinding wheel caught it and cast it out on the other side a hideous, shapeless mass.

"By the rood!" said Friar Tuck, "if I ever witness such a sight as this again I'll give up fighting."

Some moments passed before Robin Hood spoke.

"Men," he said at length, "we have rid the world of a band of monsters. Away now, and we will try to forget what we have seen. True it is that the way of transgressors is hard."

At daybreak the King of Sherwood and his merry men were on their way back to the stronghold in the forest. So fatigued were they on reaching the cave that no sooner were they welcomed and cheered by their comrades than they fell almost where they stood and slumbered through the day.

Indeed, night had come again before Friar Tuck awoke and, rubbing his eyes, sat up and looked about him.

"Glad I am," he said to himself as he rose and stretched his stiffened limbs, "that it was only a dream. Methought I was struggling with that unhappy wretch, Rudolf Fayer, in the water, and the rascal, catching my cassock, was dragging me down, down, down! Ugh! I'll take a walk in the moonlight and do my best to forget it."

"Whither away, friar?" demanded one of the sentinels.

"To yonder glade and back again," Friar Tuck replied.

"Take care that you do not fall into the hands of the Norman spies," the sentinel said.

The friar laughed and touched his quarter-staff significantly.

Once he was free of the sentinels

Friar Tuck looked around for the faithful Balaam, but the ass was nowhere to be seen.

"He has gone further afield for a richer crop of grass, I suppose," the friar murmured. "Yet it is not like Balaam to wander far from me while I sleep."

Just then the donkey came trotting through a thicket with its ears erect and its nostrils distended. The friar had trained the ass like a dog, and knew that something was ahead.

"Beauty star of the forest," he said, patting Balaam's head. "You look so well after your master that it is hard to know how to reward you. Normans, eh?"

The donkey snorted and lashed out with one of its hind legs.

"Wonderful!" said the friar. "What a pity this lovely creature on four legs cannot speak. Trot on, Balaam; I will go forward and see who disturbed your well-earned rest."

The moon was so bright that the path before the friar was as clear as day, but the shadows cast by the trees were blacker than the blackest night.

Friar Tuck trod so lightly that not a twig snapped beneath his feet. For more than a mile he went on, creeping stealthily forward, after the manner of a man stalking a stag.

Then he stopped and stooping, held his ears in the hollows of his hands to collect the slightest sound.

The sound of voices from afar reached him and he started forward again, gripping his quarter-staff and forgetting all about his reluctance to engage in another fight.

The friar stole on until he came to where some oak-trees formed a square.

In the middle of the space overhung with branches several men were sitting, and now and then, as the foliage swayed in the breeze, a flash of moonlight fell on their faces.

"'Tis said," quoth one, "that a number of foresters were seen to pass early this morning. That tells me we are on the right track. Perchance if we wait here we may catch Robin Hood coming back and send a bolt through his head."

Think of it, comrades: Oswald de Burgh has promised a capful of gold for Robin Hood, dead or alive!"

"My clever friends," muttered Friar Tuck, "Robin came back by another way. But sit you still, and I will teach you that there is danger in keeping too close company with the King of Sherwood Forest."

"But if we are caught, we shall hang," said another.

"The gold—think of the gold!" rejoined the first speaker. "Think of it—no more work, but a life of luxury. And remember," he added, "that the reward shall be fairly shared. There must be no quarrelling about that."

"There shall not be, I promise you, friend," Friar Tuck thought.

He was now almost bursting with laughter. A little nearer he crept, then, giving vent to a fearful howl that sounded like the screech of a maddened animal, he leaped bodily upon the men, sending them sprawling.

"Hey, hey!" he roared, swinging his quarter-staff. "Who talks of taking Robin Hood dead or alive?"

Right, left, down came the quarter-staff, and the astonished Normans, unable to defend themselves, received such terrific blows that sparks of fire seemed to rush from their eyes. Down they went one after the other, and staggering to their feet ran as best they could. Friar Tuck was satisfied. He could run at a pinch, but giving pursuit was not much in his line, so, laughing heartily, he went back and, picking up the crossbows which the men had left behind, he put them upon his shoulder.

"Four more beautiful weapons to be added to our armoury," he said. "Balaam, bless thee, noble lover of the thistle. How much I owe you! Aha! what, more Normans?"

"By St. George, no!" responded the voice of Little John. "Friar, you must be mad to start on such an errand alone. We heard the sound of fighting and Robin Hood sent me with a score of men to your rescue."

"He has the thanks of a man of peace," the friar replied. "But why this fuss? I came upon four poor loons thinking to get a chance shot at our chief, but, grant Heaven, that is not the way he will die."

"No, no; but come back with us without delay," urged Little John. "One of our scouts has come in with important news."

"What is it?" demanded the friar.

"I have not the full measure of it yet," the giant told him. "It has set Robin Hood thinking, and we shall be on the move again ere long. Friar, there are wrongs to be redressed, the weak to be strengthened, and other tyrants than Oswald de Burgh to be dealt with."

"And who but Robin Hood shall do it?" cried the friar.

"I know of no fitter man," Little John replied, "and Heaven send that where'er he may go the fighting friar of Sherwood Forest may not be far from his side."

"For that, gentle child, accept the thanks of a man of peace," chuckled Friar Tuck.

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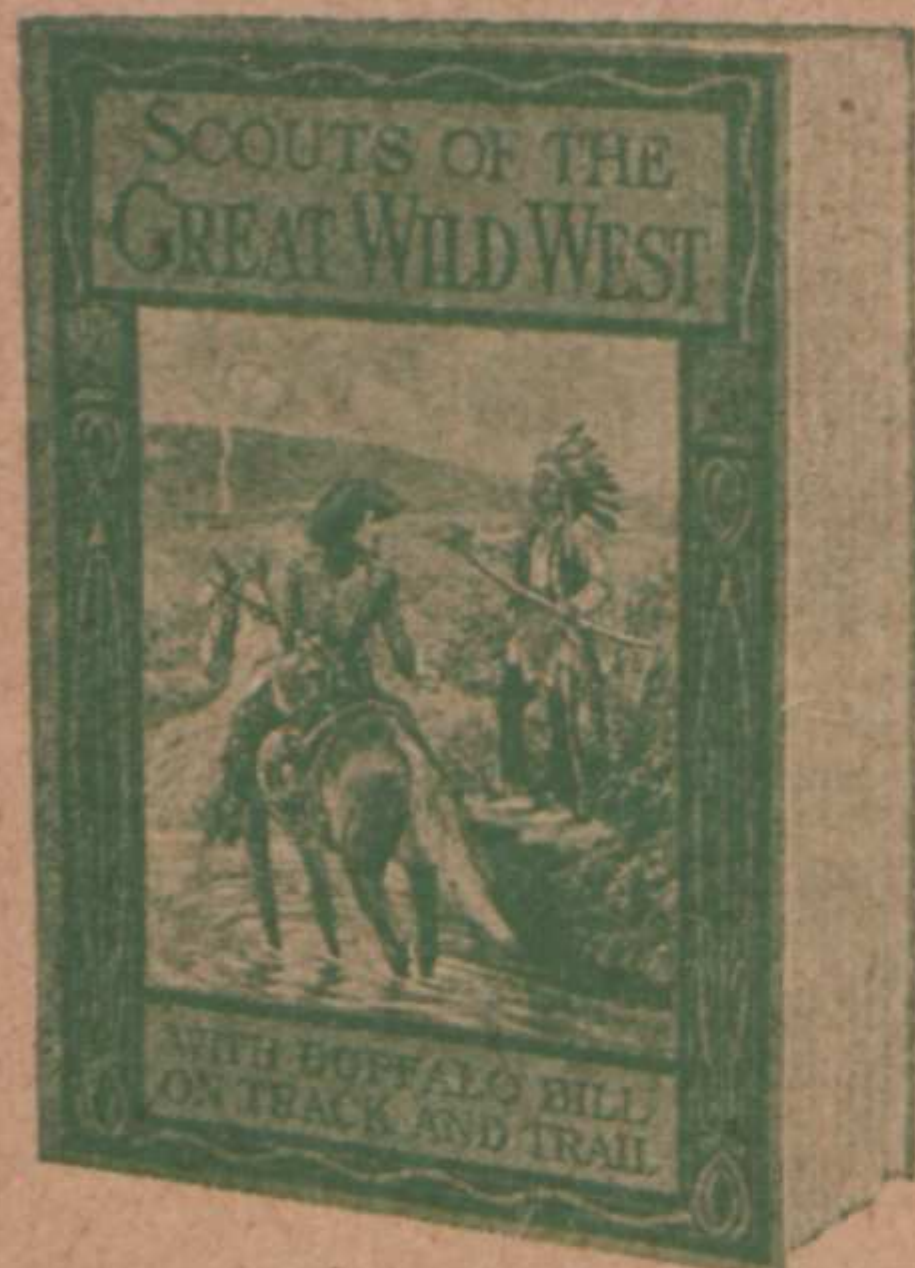
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